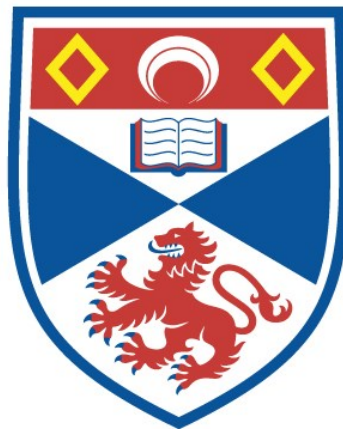


'TINY HOUSE, BIG IMPACT?': AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE 'RISE' OF THE TINY HOME LIFESTYLE (THL) IN THE UNITED STATES

Megan Elizabeth Carras

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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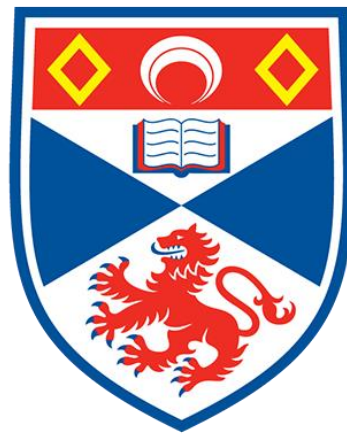
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'Tiny House, Big Impact?': An investigation into the 'rise' of the Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL) in the United States

Megan Elizabeth Carras



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (PhD) at the University of St Andrews

November 2018

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Abstract

The burst of the housing bubble in the United States ignited political and economic shockwaves, bringing global financial markets to the brink of collapse and kick-starting the Great Recession. This devastating crisis was the result of irresponsible housing practices and policy interventions rooted in the contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule that encouraged homeownership and failed to regulate high-risk lending (Aalbers, 2015). The Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL) has gained popularity amidst this contemporary era of housing instability, and offers a small, more affordable, and often aesthetically appealing version of a traditional American home. Despite growing awareness around the THL, it has been neglected as the subject of rigorous academic study. Therefore, the primary aim of this thesis was to explore and explain the Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL) in the United States. This alternative, small-living housing option was positioned amidst the traditional housing market, debt encumbrance, and contemporary consumer culture, relying on the American dream ethos as a lens to explore aspirations of homeownership.

The conceptual basis for the interrogation of the THL was rooted in the Foucauldian (1988) notion of ‘technologies of the self’. This was applied to investigate the promotion of a self-governing individual in pursuit of being a responsible and ethical citizen. The methodological approach of this research was reliant on the recent turn in governmentalities studies that employ non-archival methods to explore the nuances of governing practices and actualities of subject identity formation. One key finding of this thesis was that almost all participants expressed financial freedom as the primary motivation for adoption. Arguably, these dwellers have been governed into taking responsibility over their housing and understanding the provisions of the THL as ‘more free’ than what is provided by traditional housing, rather than the result of a constraining neoliberal mentality of rule. However, data suggested that dwellers were active in this process and appropriated normalisation and differentiation tactics to responsibilise and moralise their decision to adopt this lifestyle and become ‘tiny housers’. This thesis demonstrates how an unaffordable housing market ignited new housing ‘choices’ and how dwellers shifted identities in this process, potentially altering housing trajectories in the future. This contributes to post-recession understandings of housing amidst the contemporary neoliberal regime.

Acknowledgments

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‘There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 8)

To me, these words encompass the ‘wild-ride’ that is a PhD. Time and time again, I was pushed to reevaluate how I think and how I do things. Perhaps this is one of the greatest gifts this PhD has bestowed – providing an ‘intellectual Olympics’ that forces commitment to development, learning, and hard work. Undoubtedly, I have grown both as an academic and as a person and I am forever grateful to this experience and to my supervisors for their willingness to join me on this ride.

To the many people in my life who were with me before this journey began and have uplifted, encouraged, and shown me so much love throughout this process – Joe, Saameh, William, Alicia, Avery, Will, and the Boston crew – I am truly blessed to have such a dynamic group of friends. I cannot do life without all of you. And to my new friends that I have collected on this ride, both my fellow PhDers and those that have haphazardly entered my life in beautiful ways – Niko, Bozena, Barbara, Chen, Patrick, Steve, Gergo, and Tom – I will never forget the many conversations, both on the intellectual and perhaps the ‘less intellectual’, over food, coffee, or a pint.

And finally, to my family. You've been my constant cheerleaders. There are no words to describe how meaningful that has been. My parents, George and Elizabeth, have always encouraged me with love, understanding, and open-mindedness to grow and evolve. I could not have more thoughtful and hardworking examples. Thank you to my brothers, Jon and Joel, and my sisters-in-law, Lauren and Zanna, for always being proud of me, and for giving me the most adorable nieces and nephew. And lastly, to the most important person in my life – my daughter, Josephine – you are the one that drives and inspires me the most. If nothing else, I hope this journey has provided you an example of dedication and diligence. I hope you realize this was for the both of us. Thank you for your patience. I love you.

1. Introduction

The Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL) gained popularity in the United States amidst an affordable housing crisis, ignited by irresponsible housing practices and policy interventions rooted in the contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule. This thesis provides an investigation of the ‘rise’ of this small-space, alternative housing option in this post-recession era. The ‘contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule’ refers to an infiltration of mentalities and rationalities by neoliberal discourse and governing practices to steer how individuals come to understand themselves as free and autonomous, as described by Foucault (1997) and others (Rose, 1999; Lemke, 2001). The THL arose amidst this mentality, whereby individuals are ‘called’ to take responsibility over their livelihoods to reduce reliance on the state. In contrast to mobile homes and trailers, tiny houses are often aesthetically appealing, miniature versions of traditional American homes. These houses typically range in size from 10 m² (~100 ft²) to 37 m² (~ 400 ft²), as opposed to the average 2017 newbuilt American single-family house size of 225 m² (2,426 ft²) (United States Census Bureau, 2017). While no census for tiny homes exists, the increase in popularity can be witnessed in the prolific growth of tiny house manufacturers, with the global tiny house market estimated to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7% between 2018 and 2022 (Business Wire, 2018).

This lifestyle is marketed as providing a cost-effective, simplified, more sustainable, less regulated and more mobile housing and lifestyle option that challenges traditional housing, debt, and consumer tendencies (Shafer, 2010; Anson, 2014; Mitchell, 2014, 2018). However, the actualities of these provisions and outcomes are uncertain, as empirical investigation is lacking, arguably due to the novelty of this ‘tiny’ opportunity for homeownership. Therefore, the primary aim of this thesis is to explore and explain the Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL) in the United States. A particular focus is given to interrogating the significance of the post-recession ‘rise’ in popularity to address the limitations of existing understandings around placing this ‘choice’ amongst a broader housing context and consider the nuanced happenings at play. To do this, the thesis positions the THL amidst the traditional housing market, debt encumbrance, and contemporary consumer culture. The aim, objectives and research questions, presented in Figure 1.1, were developed through an extensive review of the literature.

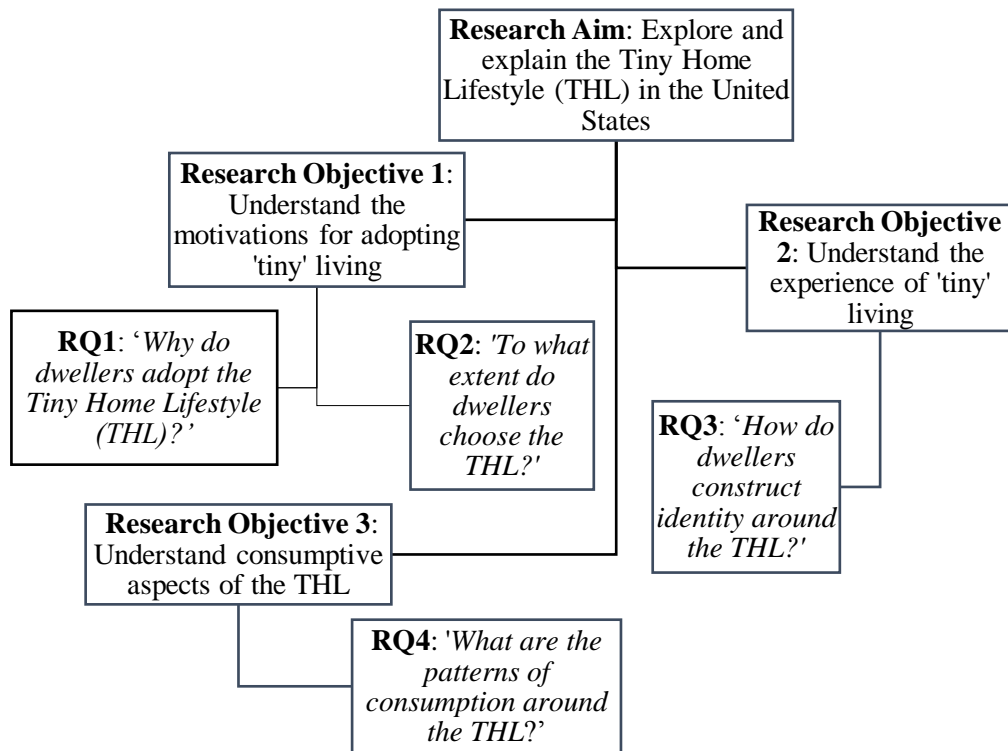


Figure 1.1 Research aim, objectives and questions

The conceptual basis of this thesis relies on Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality as used in modern liberal democracies, specifically the extent to which 'technologies of the self' are used to promote a self-governing individual in pursuit of being an active, moral, responsible, and self-reliant citizen, termed 'ethopower/ ethopolitics' by Rose (2000) (Foucault, 1982, 1988, 1991; Rose, 1996 a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Accordingly, the aim of this thesis will be met by exploring the following research objectives (RO): the actualities of governing practices involved in the adoption of the THL (RO1); the experience of 'tiny' living (RO2); and consumer culture aspects around this 'tiny', alternative living option (RO3). Together, these ROs provide an opportunity to explore how the current neoliberal mentality of rule has impacted upon the pursuit of homeownership amidst the contemporary economic crisis (Harvey, 2005, 2017; Aalbers, 2015) as subjectivities are developed and (re)constructed within this process of taking responsibility over one's housing and conforming to expectations of an optimal and aspirational way to be (Raco, 2009, 2011; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, et al. 2017; McKee, 2011; Flint, 2002, 2003). Consequently, this thesis seeks to explain: motivations for THL adoption (RQ1); the extent to which dwellers 'choose' this lifestyle (RQ2); and how identities are (re)created within this process

(RQ3). ‘Everyday’ patterns of consumption (RQ4) are also explored to investigate the governing practices involved in steering consumer tendencies specific to this housing option.

The THL is reviewed through the lens of the American dream as this ethos, underscored by fundamental American values (i.e. self-determination, individuality, autonomy, self-reliance), is used to promote the need for a continuously optimising ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Harvey, 2005). The American dream is used to normalise success and establish expectations and aspirations of homeownership (Aalbers, 2015; Harvey, 2012, 2017). Importantly, this dream is not strictly ‘American’, arguably having become a globalised dream pushed by the neoliberal mentality of rule and upheld under the guise of freedom to promote active and aspirational citizens (Rose, 1999a; Raco, 2009, 2011; Spohrer, et al. 2018). Nevertheless, the United States remains at the forefront in the promotion of this dream of prosperity and individualised material wealth (Chomsky, 2017; Callahan, 2017; Stanzel, 2015). The American dream is fundamental to early founding Jeffersonian values rooted in self-reliance, personal freedom and fulfilment as well as meritocracy, or the notion that the ability and effort of an individual is rewarded and allows for upward social mobility (Young, 1958, 2001; McNamee and Miller, Jr. 2009). Notably, despite the decline in upward social mobility over the last few decades, individuals still aspire towards the American dream and the normalised and commodified ‘superior’ tenure of choice – homeownership (Harvey, 2012; Chomsky, 2017; Shlay, 2006). Yet there is no single American dream, as individuals attach their own desires based on personal circumstances and relative comparison points (Hauhart, 2016). The contemporary normalised dream is rooted in the essential quality of ‘being aspirational’ and striving for a continuous ‘project of the self’ (Spohrer et al., 2018; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Indeed, modern liberal rationalities of rule look to infiltrate all aspects of life in order to ‘govern at a distance’ and create autonomous citizens in pursuit of the best version of their ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Foucault, 2000). This research looks to position the THL within this understanding to contribute to these debates and to future understandings of these conceptual devices.

The methodological approach of this thesis is informed by the recent turn in Foucauldian governmentality studies that use ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) methods to explore the nuances of governing practices and actualities of subject identity formation (for example: Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014, 2016; McKee, 2011, 2016). Therefore, this research provides an application of the ethnographies of

neoliberal governmentalities methodology (Brady, 2014). Rooted in this understanding, a two-phase, non-archival qualitative methodological approach is used, relying on ethnographic observations (Phase 1a/b) and semi-structured interviews (Phase 2). Phase 1 took place at tiny house events (1a), a tiny house community and one-off home sites (1b), while Phase 2 occurred via phone, Skype, and in-person. This approach is used to review the onset and experience of this alternative housing option, as well as governing practices that shape consumer patterns around living in this manner. This allows for exploration of resistance and agency amidst the THL. Scholarship that has used non-archival methodological approaches within housing studies to expose an active subject is used as precedent, for example Flint (2002, 2003), Flint and Rowlands (2003), McKee (2011, 2016), McKee et al. (2017), and McIntyre and McKee (2008). The contribution of this research fits within Foucauldian governmentality scholarship that has explored the pursuit of housing. In doing so it reveals how subjects materialise, often not as expected, amongst the ‘messiness’ of modern governing practices (Clarke, 2007; McKee, 2011). Fundamentally, this thesis looks to inform understanding of the ways in which individuals are governed into taking responsibility over their housing amidst economic uncertainty by an exploration of dweller subjectivities within the onset and experience of the THL. Simultaneously, this thesis seeks to reveal the governing practices involved in shaping consumer subjectivities and thus patterns of consumption around this small-space, non-traditional housing option.

To achieve this, the thesis is set out in the following order. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature in order to situate the development of the research aim, objectives, and questions, as well as the methodological approach. Chapter 2 begins with an inquiry into the THL, providing an examination of the current understanding and suggested provisions. Following the establishment of the THL context, an investigation of the American dream ethos is presented, firstly providing an historical overview then moving on to a review of the American dream under neoliberal governance (section 2.3). Section 2.4 builds on this, presenting the US housing policy context, normalisation and commodification tactics, ultimately exploring the housing crisis and ‘recovery’, highlighting contemporary neoliberalisation of homeownership. Section 2.5 presents Foucauldian neoliberal governmentality and technologies of self-governance, reviewing Rose’s (2000) development with his notion of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ and the more recent turn in methodological approaches, including ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methods. Section 2.6 brings

together the American dream ethos, neoliberalisation of homeownership, and Foucauldian governmentality to address the ROs and position the THL.

Chapter 3 establishes the methodological approach of this thesis. Chapter 3 begins with the presentation of the methodological approach used to investigate this alternative housing opportunity. Following from this, this section continues with the methodological understanding used to support this approach, reliant on a Foucauldian understanding of power. Subjectivity, positionality, and ontological and epistemological perspectives are presented. From this, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2000), and the qualitative approach (section 3.2), which are used by this research, are reviewed and justified. Section 3.3 presents the research process, specifically the methods of data collection (personal observations and semi-structured interviews) and analysis, the fieldwork challenges, positionality, data collection and ethical concerns. Finally, the sampling strategy and recruitment are discussed in section 3.4.

Chapter 4 is the first of three empirical chapters. Entitled ‘The American dream ethos: freedom and self-determination in the THL’, it addresses RQ1 and RQ2. Contributing to discussions around the American dream, this chapter reviews dweller expressions of freedom and self-determination as the primary motivation for adoption of the THL. Firstly, in section 4.2, empirical data are investigated amidst the American dream ethos and normalisation of homeownership. This section concludes with the presentation of two distinct dweller types identified within this research. Following this, the identified THL types, ‘Compromisers’ and ‘Detractors’, are justified and empirically explored (section 4.3). In section 4.4., the many benefits of the THL, explained as freedoms by dwellers, are considered and reviewed amidst relevant articulations of the restrictive nature of the THL. Ultimately, this chapter explores the ways in which dwellers have been governed into understanding their freedom around taking responsibility over housing and influenced by homeownership normalisation tactics (section 4.5). This aids in revealing actualities of motivations around adoption of the THL. This section also reviews the points at which dweller subjects are active and ‘contest from below’ in this process of being governed.

Chapter 5 presents the second of the three empirical chapters. This chapter is entitled ‘Becoming a ‘tiny houser’: neoliberal rationalities and identity formation’ and addresses RQ3 by discussing the construction of dweller identities around the THL. In section 5.2, empirical

data that expose the ways in which dwellers construct identity around the THL are presented, using the types of THL identified in section 4.2. Dwellers' claims of resistance are reviewed within section 5.3, looking to 'everyday dynamics' to expose governing practices. Section 5.4 concludes with a review of tiny house subjectivities as are revealed through the exploration of the 'messiness' of these governing practices in developing THL dweller identities.

Chapter 6 presents the final empirical chapter, entitled 'Neoliberal governmentalities and consumptive-conduct in the THL'. This chapter addresses RQ4 and explores empirical findings around dweller patterns of consumption. Dwellers' accounts of shifts in consumption since adopting the THL and claims of moral superiority around patterns of consumption are presented (section 6.2). Building on this in section 6.3, the tensions and contradictions in dwellers' consumptive tendencies are investigated. Section 6.4 concludes with an exploration of dweller consumer subjectivities developed amongst governing practices that look to push the optimisation of the 'self'.

This thesis concludes with chapter 7 which highlights the key findings and contributions, exploring the extent to which this thesis met the aim, objectives, and research questions set out. This chapter also provides research limitations and suggestions for future academic considerations.

This research provides interrogation of this small-living, alternative housing option that arose alongside an economic crisis, and in doing so investigates decision-making and identity formation around the contemporary housing market. Resulting in a contribution to understandings of the impact of contemporary neoliberal policymaking on housing trajectories, and providing a timely exploration of how individuals are both governed by and acting against traditional housing 'choices'.

2. Literature review: positioning the THL

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to present and justify the novel approach and contribution of this thesis, specifically, investigating the ‘rise’ of this small-space, alternative housing option through the lens of the American dream ethos using the ethnographies of neoliberal governmentality perspective (Brady, 2014). The importance of this research is established by highlighting the complexities, contradictions, and relative minimal understanding of the THL; thus demonstrating the opportunities in exposing the nuanced happenings involved in the THL experience. Following the ROs, the goal of this chapter is twofold: (1) to contextualise the THL and situate it within the wider scholarship around the pursuit of homeownership in the current era of neoliberal governance; and (2) to explore the ‘everyday’ consumptive aspects of this housing option and investigate claims that it seeks to challenge consumptive tendencies and traditional consumer culture. It does so by exploring ideas surrounding the American dream and the continued pursuit of this ethos in the contemporary neoliberal era, notable even in ‘tiny house’ discourses (Centeno and Cohen, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Chomsky, 2017). Informing these discussions are the ethnographies of Foucauldian governmentality approach, adopted to expose the ‘messiness’ of ‘everyday’ governing practices in relation to the THL (for example: Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). Therefore, this chapter attempts to bring together and develop these conceptual elements to provide a basis for the methodological and empirical contributions of this thesis in its review of the THL.

Section 2.2 begins with an overview of the THL, including the few academic contributions to date that have uncovered areas in need of exploration, highlighting the timely nature of this investigation. The section concludes with a summary of the gaps this research is looking to fill and a justification of the approach taken. Section 2.3 provides an investigation and definition of the American dream, giving attention to the embedded nature of homeownership within this ethos. Section 2.4 moves on to review the US housing context in order to position policy interventions around the normalisation and commodification of homeownership. Furthermore, governing practices that ignited the 2008 crisis are explored to understand the wider context from which the THL emerged, while current policy is reviewed to position the continued popularity. Section 2.5 turns to Foucauldian understandings of power and governmentality to explain the distinct methodological approach taken by this thesis,

discussing Rose's (2000) development of governmentality through his notion of 'ethopower/ethopolitics'. This is used to explore how modern liberal democracies self-govern individuals into taking responsibility over themselves by pursuing a continual 'project of the self'. The penultimate section 2.6 positions the THL and the ROs within understandings of neoliberal governing practices and the American dream ethos. Specifically, it investigates: (1) scholarship that explores governing of rationalities and how the pursuit of homeownership is governed; and (2) scholarship that highlights the governance of consumption. Finally, section 2.7 presents concluding remarks.

2.2 The Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL)

This section provides an exploration of the THL in order to frame the review of scholarship. Despite growing awareness around the THL, it has been neglected as the subject of rigorous academic study. Section 2.2.1 provides an overview of the THL in order to present a brief 'story' of the onset of this small-space living opportunity that has gained popularity in recent years. Section 2.2.2 lays out the minimal geographic, demographic, and known aspects related to the popularity and growth of this lifestyle. This lifestyle is marketed by its proponents as offering a more sustainable, affordable, less regulated, and simplified housing and lifestyle option (Schafer, 2010; Mitchell, 2014, 2018; Anson, 2014, 2017). These potential provisions are explored around categories relevant to this research approach in section 2.2.3. Section 2.2.4 concludes with a summary of the gaps this research is looking to fill and a justification of the approach taken.

Firstly, the title of 'Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL)', used throughout this thesis, is because of the uncertainty of conceptualising this housing option as a 'social movement'. This housing option is frequently referred to as the 'Tiny House Movement' in media, television, and on the multitude of tiny house community online platforms (for example, Facebook pages: 'Tiny House Movement UK', 'Tiny House Movement Europe'). For instance, according to the popular website entitled 'The Tiny Life' it is 'a social movement where people are looking to downsize the space they live in'. The motivation for adoption of this lifestyle has received minimal empirical review and critique. In fact, this housing option arguably represents a move towards individualistic and autonomous attempts at taking ownership over one's housing (Anson, 2014). However, 'movements feature collective (rather than individual action), preferences for change, a degree of organization' while 'lifestyles encompass

people's 'everyday' practices, tastes, consumption habits' (McAdams and Snow, 1997; Featherstone, 1987, p. 55). Recent studies in Lifestyle Movements (LM) have sought to broaden the definition of 'movement', including such lifestyle trends as veganism and green living that fit between lifestyles and movements (Haenfler et al., 2012), identifying these as 'individualized collective action' that promote a lifestyle to foster social change (Micheletti, 2003, p. 24). However, the extent to which the THL is indeed a LM in which dwellers are adopting this lifestyle for the greater social good is unclear. An investigation of the motivation behind adoption of the THL is of interest to this research and has the potential to add to this debate. Additionally, the title of 'THL' was developed in order to make distinct the way in which this research reviews this particular housing and lifestyle opportunity. Under the umbrella of 'Tiny House Movement', the use of tiny houses as 'starter' structures for the homeless is often included (for example Wyatt, 2014; Beam, 2015; Turner, 2017; Mingoya, 2015); however, while the investigation of the use of these tiny houses for homeless individuals is critical, it is not within the reach of this research approach. This research is focused on individuals with an existent relationship to traditional housing (homeownership or rental) and have 'chosen' this lifestyle thereafter.

2.2.1 An overview of the THL

Many attribute the authorship of a 'simple and small living' mentality in the United States to the 'first 'tiny house' evangelist', David Henry Thoreau (Laskey, 2016; Anson, 2017; Diguette, 2017). Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) documented his experience of living in a cabin in the woods for two years and promoted a livelihood of reduced expenses and appreciation of small and simple living. The current wave gained traction in the late '90s and early 2000s, ignited by a few individuals looking to live more simply and cost-effectively, for example Luhrs (1997) and Taylor-Hough (2000). Architect Sarah Susanka's book *The Not So Big House* (1998), which emphasises the need to 'build better, not bigger' homes, is credited by many for inspiring this lifestyle (Anson, 2017). Jay Shafer, recognised as the 'founding father', popularised 'small-living' through his appearance on *The Oprah Show* in 2007 and through the establishment of two companies (Tumbleweed and Four Lights Tiny House) (Friedlander, 2014; Nonko, 2017). Certainly, small-space housing options have historically existed within American housing culture, for example shantytowns in New York City (Plunz, 1992) and America's long history with mobile homes and trailer parks (Hart et al., 2002). Yet, the THL is promoted as offering an alternative to traditional housing and mortgage

reliance while maintaining a ‘desirable’ version of homeownership (Mitchell, 2014, 2018). As opposed to mobile homes and trailers, ‘many tiny houses are designed to avoid sacrificing the ‘luxury’ associated with more conspicuous consumption’ (Anson, 2017, p. 332).

Tiny houses typically range in size from 10 m² (~100 ft²) to 37 m² (~ 400 ft²) and are stand-alone structures (Michell, 2014). These homes can be built on foundations or wheels, although often wheels are required to get around minimum habitable dwelling allowances. Tiny houses can either be self-built, purchased from a tiny house builder outright, or constructed from a tiny house kit (Mitchell, 2014, 2018). Homes are parked in recreational vehicle (RV) parks, or on rented or purchased private lands. Due to its legal ambiguity and the ‘fly under the radar’ mentality attached to this lifestyle, there is no census on the number of tiny houses currently inhabited in the United States. The Annual Tiny House Jamboree, launched in 2015, highlights its popularity, with attendance estimated at 40,000 in 2015, over 60,000 in 2016, and reaching 75,000 in 2017. Google searches for ‘tiny house for sale’ and ‘build your own tiny house’ both increased by over 900% from January 2014 to 2017 (Bastek, 2016). Furthermore, prolific growth in public interest around this lifestyle since the 2008 recession is exemplified by increased media attention; examples include TV programmes such as *Tiny House Nation* and *Tiny House Hunters* and the documentaries *TINY: A Story About Living Small* (2013) and *Small is Beautiful: A Tiny House Documentary* (2015). This increase in attention and popularity is exemplified by the array of news articles discussing this housing option since the housing crisis, as displayed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Tiny house media attention

| Source | Article title | Date |
|---------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| The New York Times | ‘The next little thing?’ (Kurutz, 2008) | 10 th September, 2008 |
| The New Yorker | ‘Let’s get small: the rise of the tiny-house movement’ (Wilkinson, 2011) | 25 th June, 2011 |
| The Washington Post | ‘Home, squeezed home: Living in a 200 square-foot space’ (Wax, 2012) | 27 th November, 2012 |
| National Geographic | ‘Tiny House, Happy Life?’ (Stone, 2012) | 10 th December, 2012 |
| Huffington Post | ‘Macy Miller’s Idaho Tiny Home is literally her dream come true’ (Manetti, 2013) | 31 st May, 2013 |
| ABC | ‘Downscaling to a tiny house to find big happiness’ (Shields, 2014) | 30 th April, 2014 |
| Huffington Post | ‘This Tiny Home doesn’t have a toilet, but it might hold the key to happiness’ (Dyas, 2014) | 16 th July, 2014 |
| The Washington Post | ‘Tiny house, big benefits: Freedom from mortgage and worries – and stuff’ (Patel, 2015) | 25 th of June, 2015 |
| VPR | ‘Freedom in a can: One couple is taking their tiny home around the country’ (Keefe and Russell, 2015) | 18 th of November, 2015 |
| USA Today | ‘Recession-scarred Millennials fuel growing interest in tiny homes’ (Jones, 2016) | 18 th of May, 2016 |
| The Guardian | ‘Tiny home communities: housing solution or gentrified trailer parks’ (Kimble, 2018) | 26 th of June, 2018 |
| USA Today | ‘With rents on rise, city makes room for ‘tiny homes’ on land it owns’ (MacDonald -Evoy, 2018) | 3 rd of April, 2018 |

2.2.2 What we know: industry growth and demographics

The THL can be better understood from a review of the rise of the tiny house industry in the US, and the potential growth can be perceived. While acknowledging this as imprecise, this provides some understanding to otherwise uncertain aspects of the THL. Mike Schmidt, business development director for the Tiny Home Industry Association (THIA), estimates there to be 85-90 tiny home developers in the US as of 2017. Each developer builds approximately ten homes per year, while DIY builders are approximated at 150-200, resulting in about 2,000 new homes per year, according to Schmidt (Sisson, 2017). Further, tiny house builders are reporting prolific growth, suggesting that numbers are perhaps larger than these estimates, and a substantial expected increase in sales is on the horizon. Legacy Housing, which builds, sells, and finances tiny houses, claimed \$169 million in sales for the

12 months before September 2018 (Renaissance Capital, 2018). Escape Tiny Homes, a Wisconsin-based builder, reported a 200% growth in recent years, with plans to build two new manufacturing locations with a targeted output of thousands of tiny home per year (Sisson, 2017). Similarly, the RV industry is seeing record sales, especially among Millennials and Baby Boomers, with 2017 being the highest on record, and 2018 coming in a close second (RVIA, 2018). In addition, a 2018 survey conducted by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) found that a market for tiny homes exists, with 53% of surveyed adults stating ‘yes’ or ‘maybe’ to living in a house $< 56 \text{ m}^2$ (600 ft^2), of which Millennials polled at 63%, Gen Xers at 53%, Baby Boomers at 45%, and Seniors at 29% (NAHB, 2018).

Still, the actualities of tiny home numbers, demographics, and geography remain unclear. The online site, ‘The Tiny Life’, claims to have conducted ‘the single largest census of the tiny house movement’, and, while not providing data on numbers of homes, contributes some useful geographic and demographic information (The Tiny Life, 2018). According to this survey of approximately 2000 dwellers, 64% are women, 35% hold a university degree, and 20% hold a graduate level degree, which is significantly higher than the US average of 5%. Dwellers span age groups, with 25% aged between 22 to 30, 20% between 31 to 40, and 20% between 51 to 60. Most dwellers reside in the following five states: California, Oregon, Texas, North Carolina, and Florida. ‘Tiny housers’ are seemingly better off financially, as 60% have no credit card debt, and 55% have more savings than the average homeowner. Tiny houses range in price, with those on wheels listing at approximately \$46,300 on average, while tiny homes on both wheels and foundations are priced at \$119,000 on average (The Tiny Life, 2018). These estimates provide a useful starting point; however, much is still uncertain about tiny living, especially lacking is clarity on the motivations for adoption and actualities of the experience of living in these spaces.

Despite minimal empirical exploration, this lifestyle is marketed as offering a more sustainable, affordable, less regulated, simplified, more fulfilling, and more mobile housing and lifestyle option (Schafer, 2010; Mitchell, 2014, 2018; Anson, 2013, 2017). Therefore, next in section 2.2.3, these suggested provisions are reviewed in order to highlight potential areas of interest in this research.

2.2.3 Provisions of the THL?

This section presents further details around and investigates what the proponents of the THL lifestyle believe it to provide. The primary aim of this thesis was to position this post-recession response to housing amidst the traditional housing market, debt encumbrance and contemporary consumer culture, as presented in the prior chapter. Therefore, the suggested offerings are reviewed across the following categories: (1) financial ease versus legal issues; (2) countering consumer culture; (3) simplification and minimalism. These categories are used in order to ‘unwrap’ the motivations for, experience of, and consumptive aspects of this small-space living option, consequently establishing the gap this research is looking to address. Acknowledging the perspective of the key authors relied upon within this section, both Shafer (2010) and Mitchell (2014, 2018) are THL ‘leaders’ with websites and books, while Anson (2014, 2017) and Mutter (2013) investigated the THL as graduate students.

2.2.3.1 Financial ease versus legal issues

The THL is often framed as offering affordable housing outside the financial burden of traditional housing (Schafer, 2010; Mitchell, 2014, 2018), while at the same time it is promoted as providing freedom, resilience, self-reliance, happiness and fulfilment. This contrast is evidenced by the headlines in Table 2.1. Together, these headlines promote a positive view of the THL as something which offers self-reliant and hardworking individuals an empowering mode by which to reduce financial burdens and achieve a different way of life. Furthermore, notions of debt avoidance and not succumbing to risky debt culture is prevalent in THL discourses (Mitchell, 2018; Anson, 2014), and is seemingly the case based on ‘The Tiny Life’ census, presented above. Indeed, monthly expenses are reduced as rental/mortgage payments are minimal and utility costs are low due to the smaller space. However, tiny houses tend to cost more per square meter than larger houses to build (Foreman and Lee, 2005) and range in cost from approximately USD \$10,000 to over \$100,000. Loan opportunities are sparse due to legal ambiguities around defining these spaces as dwellings, as most do not meet minimum habitable dwelling requirements, and their high potential for loss in value (Mutter, 2013). Certainly, significant financial capital is required to support such a project, such that the opportunity to participate in the THL may be more limited than promoted. However, the THL does offer a substantial savings opportunity for some, as the median sale price of a new home in the US is \$315,300 as of February 2019 (US Census, 2019),

Furthermore, this lifestyle is defined by legal hindrances, such as permit issues, zoning laws, and land availability, which act as barriers for many dwellers. Tiny homes have no fixed definition, which has resulted in uncertainty around how best to handle these structures within zoning and coding regulations. Most often these homes are built on wheels to counter their uncertain legal status, allowing them to be categorised as trailers or mobile homes. These trailers are then, on occasion, eligible for RV loans from the bank, although higher interest rates and taxes apply (Mutter, 2013). RVs can be moved around freely but are subject to maximum stay allowances at many RV parks, as well as zoning requirements around water and sewer systems. Depending on locality, some tiny homes can be classified as accessory dwelling units (ADU) and placed in the backyard of larger single-family homes (Schafer, 2010). This means that most tiny homes are currently located on private land as legal issues have limited the establishment of tiny house communities (Anson, 2017). Reduced financial burden and living outside of certain regulatory requirements are outcomes of this housing option for those able to pursue it (i.e. with substantial initial investment and access to private lands). The legal ambiguity of these small houses is complicated and locality-dependent; each dweller is required to educate themselves on specific options and they often live within a legal grey area. Tiny house advocates have pushed for legal shifts, and have been successful in some regard, for example, a new appendix in the 2018 International Residential Code (IRC) relaxes ceiling height and stairway requirements. The IRC now provides the beginnings of a more accessible legal framework for adoption if localities decide to do so. However, this is voluntarily adopted by jurisdiction (Sisson, 2017). Zoning restrictions remain the most burdensome barrier, yet small successes have occurred with a handful of towns changing laws to accommodate tiny homes (for example, Lyons, Colorado; Portland, Oregon; Austin, Texas; Pleasant Grove, Utah; Fresno, California; and Spur, Texas), although some caveats do apply. As legal hindrances are one of the most significant barriers for those looking to adopt (Mutter, 2013), only time will tell as to whether widespread shifts will be made, perhaps allowing for more growth.

The actualities of these aspects of the THL (i.e. empirical accounts of providing financial ease and impacts of legality issues) have received little scholarly attention and accordingly offer new opportunity to explore such a growing phenomenon. Of particular interest,

therefore, is how the THL is positioned as a ‘low-cost’ housing option, and one which claims to offer greater empowerment and fulfilment.

2.2.3.2 Countering consumer culture

The THL was born, in part, out of the desire to counter consumer culture and pursue simpler, more sustainable livelihoods, according to the founder of the lifestyle, Jay Shafer (2010). Arguably, however, the need for substantial capital or access to credit to fund such a project highlights the limitations and perhaps elitism of this version of conscious consumerism (Carfagna et al., 2014). Rhetoric around the THL therefore runs the risk of reducing this lifestyle to ‘environmental romanticism’ and situating it within the ever-present commodification of sustainability (Anson, 2014) and as another ‘mode of consumption’ (Dopierala, 2017). In addition, originally promoted as an opportunity to self-build one’s house and act against McMansion trends, tiny houses have become substantially commercialised in recent years. While some tiny house dwellers hold steady to the core values around the founding of the THL, such as building one’s own structure and simplified living, the exponential growth and commodification of this ‘low-cost’ housing option is notable. Indeed, as presented above, the number of tiny house building companies has grown substantially in recent years, offering plans, trailers, and both partially and fully pre-fabricated tiny houses ready for delivery. Moreover, these homes are often built to be cute, colourful, aesthetically ‘entertaining’, and arguably ‘Disneyfied’, versions of home (Bryman, 2004). The extent to which this housing choice sits outside of traditional consumer values and commodification of housing, as well as the extent to which it sits within a commodified version of sustainability, is of particular interest to this thesis, and has received little robust academic consideration thus far.

One important area of research is the impact that small-space living may have on patterns of consumption. For example, one empirical investigation of a self-build tiny dweller found that this lifestyle does indeed bring a deeper understanding of resource requirements, waste accumulation, and authentic choices around home needs (Anson, 2014). According to Anson (2014), consumptive intentionality in tiny house living ‘spills over’ to other goods due to spatial constraints. More widely, a range of studies has explored elements of small-space living and their relationship with consumption, for example: household size, energy consumption and income (Yalcintas and Kaya, 2017); household size and energy use

(Klocker et al., 2012); household size and resource consumption (Lui et al., 2003); housing price and consumption (Campbell and Cocco, 2007; Attanasio et al., 2011); house size and building resource use and energy use (Wilson and Boehland, 2005); house wealth, or total value of the housing capital, and consumption (Iacoviello, 2010); household size, income, and water consumption (Harlan et al., 2009); and downsizing and energy demand (Huebner and Shipworth, 2017). Although such scholarship is important in beginning the conversation, there is a need for further research around the relationship between house size and patterns of consumption, particularly that which focuses on THL, given that this is a growing phenomenon.

Finally, this lifestyle may have the potential to impact housing consumption trends, which have been found to act significantly differently from other goods, according to Fang Yang (2009). Whereby as the demand for many goods declines with the age of the consumer, housing consumption remains high and flat (Fang Yang, 2009) and is perhaps linked to the prevalence of a consumer in pursuit of the ‘bigger and better’ house throughout much of their life, despite recent trends around downsizing. This mentality is furthered by the commodification of housing, normalisation of homeownership, and the neoliberal tendency to place the responsibility on the individual or family to obtain housing that increases in value over time (McKee, 2012). The potential for the THL to counter the tendency towards continued pursuit of the bigger house that carries massive resource intensity is something to consider. Indeed, the average size of a single-family home has doubled in the US since 1950, despite the fact that family size has declined (Wilson and Boehland, 2005). As larger spaces mean more raw materials, land area, heating, cooling, and lighting consumed, tiny houses are less resource-intensive simply due to the reduced size (Wilson and Boehland, 2005). However, the ways in which the THL counters, disrupts, or aligns with this tendency around consumption of housing appears to have received no scholarly investigation, highlighting an area in need of review.

Notably, millennials, characterised by high levels of education, high levels of student debt, and an uncertain job market, are delaying or putting off purchasing ‘large ticket items’ such as homes and cars due to financial impracticality (Bleemer et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2015). This is exemplified by the growing phenomenon of ‘Generation Rent’, or younger people remaining longer in the rental sector, largely in the UK, US, and Australia (McKee et al.,

2017; Ronald, 2017). Schenk (2015) argues that a shift in the way in which these individuals identify with and value home has occurred after witnessing the financial hardship many of their parents experienced, thus may partly explain their pursuit of the THL. Others suggest that millennials have the desire to own a home but simply are not able to do so (Davidson, 2014; McKee et al., 2017), while some are happy to pay rent (Gallier, 2016). This is a vital area of exploration, as this generation of young people will define the future of housing consumption trends. An exploration of the intentions and motivations around adoption and experience of the THL for all dwellers has the potential to support understandings around this lifestyle superseding traditional housing for the long-term for some parts of society.

2.2.3.3 Simplification and minimalism

The notions of ‘voluntary simplification’, ‘getting back to nature’, and both the purging and rejection of ‘stuff’ are prevalent within THL rhetoric. Yet, elitist at their core, these are restricted to those of a certain privilege able to consider such a lifestyle. In fact, the THL has been accused of poverty appropriation due the ‘choice’ involved in getting rid of possessions and downsizing one’s life (Westhale, 2015). As Westhale (2015) asks, ‘How many folks, I wonder, who have engaged in the Tiny House Movement have ever actually lived in a tiny, mobile place? Because what those who can afford [these tiny] homes call ‘living light’, poor folks call ‘gratitude for what we’ve got’. Undoubtedly, ‘human beings have always lived in small houses – not to make a statement but because small houses were practical and cheap’ (Wilkinson, 2011, p. 29). The THL, however, gained popularity amidst an economic recession, a significant point of interest, lacking in empirical review. Therefore, this narrative of the elitist ‘simplifier’ looking to pursue ‘voluntary poverty’ as a form of conspicuous consumption and a means to live outside of the wastefulness of McMansion culture is not so clear-cut, and points to potential areas of contradiction and tension within the THL. Furthermore, while many dwellers appear to pursue affordable housing under the guise of simple and sustainable living, the desire by many adoptees to maintain an expected amount of luxury is notable (Anson, 2014). These areas of interest are investigated at greater depths in section 2.6.2, with regard to academic studies on ethical consumption, minimalism, and simplification (for example Lee and Ahn, 2016; Schor, 1999; Nelson et al., 2007). Conversely, the use of tiny houses as ‘starter’ structures for the homeless, subsidised by government or non-profits, highlights the poverty alleviation potential for the lifestyle in some instances. However, this research approach focuses on those financially able to adopt

this lifestyle as a means to pursue homeownership in order to expose the motivations and experience of individuals with a relationship to traditional housing. This has the potential to reveal how the THL could influence housing consumption in the long term.

With the offerings of the THL set out, this section concludes by situating the approach taken to fill many of the fundamental empirical uncertainties presented.

2.2.4 Identifying gaps and framing the approach

This section highlighted the lack of systematic academic scholarship on the issue of the THL. This is perhaps unsurprising given the newness of the phenomenon and its rate of growth. There is thus a significant, and pressing, opportunity to engage with and understand the THL in order to verify the many positive benefits proponents of THL promote (e.g., as highlighted above these comprise low cost, simplification, sustainability, less regulation). Yet it is of vital importance to dig beyond relatively superficial benefits to question where the desire for homeownership comes from, and the way in which this acts to shape the THL, particularly via individual responsibility or the pursuit of an optimal, productive ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Taking this step to delve deeper into debates, and theoretically informed ones in particular, has the potential to contribute to the many gaps identified above: how to define this housing option; actualities of financial ease and legalities; reasons for increased popularity amidst an economic crisis; potential for long-term impact on housing consumption trends; actualities of simplification discourses; and the relationship to traditional housing and consumer culture.

Fundamentally, the approach of this thesis is rooted in Foucauldian understandings of the ‘micro-physics’ of power. Specifically, relying upon the recent turn in neoliberal governmentality scholarship that uses ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) methods to review the ‘messiness’ of governing practices at the ‘everyday’ level, exposing potentialities of activated agency and resistance (for example Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). The housing context from which this lifestyle rose and grew, and the many apparent tensions and contradictions around the THL, justify this approach. The use of the American dream ethos to review the THL amidst this investigation of governing practices is justified as this ethos, and core aspects of it, are used to normalise success and steer the pursuit of homeownership (Chomsky, 2017; Harvey,

2012). Indeed, as evidenced by the rhetoric around the THL, fundamental American values of self-reliance, autonomy, and self-determination are at the core of this lifestyle. Similarly, these notions are embedded in the normalisation of homeownership, commodification of housing, and desire to optimise the ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Bringing these understandings together allows for more nuanced discernment of the ‘rise’ and experience of the THL.

The section provided an investigation of the THL in order to present the minimal understanding to date and expose the realities of the many suggested provisions, resulting in a justification of the approach taken to address the identified gaps. Next, the point of view of this thesis is reviewed and the context from which the THL arose is presented. This is done by interrogating the traditional pursuit of homeownership as it relates to the American dream ethos, and a similar global ethos, which normalises success via the marketisation of all aspect of life (section 2.3). Then in section 2.4, the housing policy context from which the THL emerged and grew is presented in order to ground the conceptual aspects of this approach. Following this in section 2.5, Foucauldian governmentality and subsequent developments are probed to provide an understanding of the governing practices involved in steering contemporary housing, relating it specifically to the adoption and experience of the THL. Finally, in section 2.6, this review concludes with a joining of the contextual and conceptual to more fully establish the point of view of this research, and the basis for the empirical investigation.

2.3 The American dream ethos

This section presents the American dream ethos, used as a conceptual lens to review the THL. Section 2.3.1 provides a brief history of this ethos, positioned within the myth of meritocracy and evolution of the capitalistic agenda. Section 2.3.2 elaborates on the use of this ethos by the contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule to support self-reliant, aspirational, and driven individuals. Section 2.3.3 positions the pursuit of homeownership around this ethos. Section 2.3.4 connects the American dream to the growth of consumer culture in the US. Finally, in section 2.3.5, a working definition of the American dream for adoption in this thesis, drawing on understandings gained from the preceding sections, is presented. This section aids in positioning the THL amidst the long history of the American

dream ethos, which was underscored housing from the start, and the continued glorification of self-reliance and individuality in contemporary culture.

2.3.1 Historical overview

The American dream is rooted in the idea of meritocracy, or the notion that the ability and effort of an individual is rewarded and allows for upward social mobility (Young, 1958, 2001; McNamee and Miller Jr., 2009). Historian and oligarch, James Truslow Adams, in his 1931 book, *The Epic of America* popularised the term ‘American dream’ in the early years of the Great Depression (Hauhart, 2016). As defined by Adams (1931), the American dream is ‘a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position’ (p. xx). Adam’s American dream was a twentieth-century iteration of early Lockean and Jeffersonian ideas of hard work, virtue, happiness, freedom, self-determination, individualism, innovation, and prosperity (Hauhart, 2016). Essentially, Adams named and ‘packaged’ these embedded American ideals. However, in 1933, Adams wrote in the *New York Times* of a ‘hijacked’ American dream and of the extreme socio-economic divide that burdened America (Wright, 2018, p. 57). Seemingly, Adams recanted his dream, accusing it of being a fantasy. It is perhaps not by accident that this ethos arose during the Great Depression, an era recognised by many at the time to be the result of monopoly capitalism (Agar and Tate, 1936). Even from the start, then, this ethos seems to highlight the myth of meritocracy and the failures of capitalism.

2.3.2 The expansion of the American dream

The contemporary American dream has expanded from Adam’s original 1931 vision into a dream of material accumulation and consumerism in the mid-twentieth century, ignited by an economic boom and the credit system. The dream expanded exponentially into a hyper dream of excessive material accumulation defined by massive indebtedness in an era of low social mobility (Calder, 1999; Hyman, 2012). The notion of individualism, so deeply embedded in early American ideology, has been fundamental to the longevity of the American dream ethos (Cullen, 2003). Individualism was rudimentary to Benjamin Franklin’s 1758 *The Way to Wealth*, which established an ideology of the lone worker who developed self-worth and fulfilment through work, an ideology that was carried into the economic values of America, producing the workforce necessary to create a capitalistic system (Weber, 1905). Thus, this

notion is fundamental to the success of the American capitalistic machine. However, individualism has also been preyed upon by the neoliberal mentality of rule in order to govern every domain of life (Foucault, 1988, 1991, 2000; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

Under neoliberal governance, this ethos and the meritocracy myth it supports was and is deliberately used to maximise human capital through hegemonic discourses that push for individualism and self-reliance (Chomsky, 2017; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). This neoliberal mentality of rule looks to reduce reliance on the state through governing individuals into understanding themselves as autonomous, responsible, and self-aspiring, in pursuit of an optimal and enterprising ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Raco, 2009, 2011). Indeed, contemporary policymaking is largely looking to take responsibility off the state by addressing ‘aspirational deficiencies’ whereby responsibility is placed on the individual, while normalisation tactics around success suggest how and what to aspire to (Raco, 2009, 2011). These understandings are returned to in order to further review the ‘how’ of modern neoliberal governance through the lens of governmentality (section 2.5), and specifically the governing of housing (section 2.6).

Simultaneously, neoliberal policies of the last few decades, defined by de-regulation and privatisation, have resulted in the decline of both economic prosperity and upward social mobility (Harvey, 2012). Therefore, while the American dream ethos has been slighted by contradictions of capitalism from the start, the version of the American dream that is available for some has become unreachable for most (Chomsky, 2017; Harvey, 2012) as the potential to earn more than one’s parents is on a downward trajectory with each decade (Chetty et al., 2017; Ghosh, 2013; Hauhart, 2016). The onset of ‘Generation Rent’ highlights the downward shift in social mobility, whereby the increased difficulty in accessing the labour market coupled with the uncertainty in opportunity for purchasing a house has resulted in a generation burdened with economic instability (McKee et al., 2017). Governing practices continue to push for an aspirational and self-reliant individual in pursuit of upward social mobility (Raco, 2009, 2011). This is evidenced by the following account that highlights how the myth of meritocracy and false proclamations of opportunity are alive and well in contemporary United States political rhetoric:

We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own.

President Barack Obama, 4th of December 2013

The pursuit of the American dream continues, despite the fact that the opportunity for upward social mobility is on the decline and the United States is one of the most unequal developed economies (Desilver, 2013; Chetty et al., 2017). Many are unaware of the realities of the American dream, most still believing it to be achievable. For example, a 2009 *New York Times* and CBS News poll, conducted in the midst of the recession, found that 72% of Americans still believed that with hard work an individual could become rich (Seelye, 2009). Therefore, contemporary neoliberal governance that has infiltrated daily life has both created an ever-growing socioeconomic divide and market instability, and subjectified individuals in the name of individualism and self-reliance (Chomsky, 2017; Harvey, 2012; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Foucault, 1988) (reviewed in section 2.5).

Next, in section 2.3.3, a brief historical review of homeownership in the US is linked to the American dream ethos.

2.3.3 The American dream of homeownership

Land and property ownership was inherent in early American conceptions of ‘success’ and opportunity, whereby land ownership brought legal rights, social status and, in some states, voting rights (Jackson, 1985; Shlay, 2006). Yet land ownership was not accessible to women and minorities. This Jeffersonian understanding of land rights highlighted the early embeddedness of homeownership as the tenure of choice within American culture, while also using it as a tool to divide and discriminate (Wright, 1983; Shlay, 2006). After the Great Depression revealed the shortcomings of private lending markets, the federal government stepped in and established programmes to stabilise the housing market (for example, the Federal Housing Administration [FHA]), furthering their agenda of creating a nation of homeowners. This twentieth-century push for homeownership was linked to the notion that a stable home creates a loyal citizen, rooted in a fear of communism and labour unrest (Wright, 1983; Hayden, 1981). Housing policies were further expanded post-WWII to stimulate the economy through various finance innovations, including subsidised loans and increases in credit from secondary mortgage markets (Shlay, 2006). Subsidised loans were prohibited in

urban and minority neighbourhoods, thus leading to a suburban exodus of largely white-middle class (Jackson, 1985). Indeed, the American dream moved to the suburbs, further perpetuating divisions between homeowners and non-homeowners (renters) and the desirable way to be housed (Carliner, 1998). As Shlay (2006) argues, US homeownership policy has been about ‘creating the expectation of owning one’s own home’ (p. 511). The onset of neoliberal policymaking in the latter part of the twentieth century relied on the pursuit of the American dream and the embedded expectation around this aspirational tenure of choice to reinforce their agenda. This pursuit of homeownership is supported and encouraged by the onset of the dream of consumption in all aspects of life, resulting in excessive spending and debt, discussed next in 2.3.4.

2.3.4 The American dream of consumption

Supported by the Industrial Revolution, the American dream mentality that touted individualism and the continued need for hard work resulted in booming markets and a surplus of goods in the late 19th and early 20th century (Trentmann, 2012). For fear of decoupling workers from their work, instead of decreasing production, the working class was encouraged to become consumers. Simon Patten, chair of Wharton School of Business, in 1899 declared that the country had entered a ‘new order of consumption’ (Trentmann, 2016). The concern with satisfying basic human needs, for many, had passed, igniting a shift in America’s consumptive tendencies. However, consuming was not natural to many; thus corporate marketing campaigns were established to persuade working Americans (Beder, 2004). The Roaring Twenties brought the first wave of American consumerism, supported by the onset of credit institutions. ‘Leisure time’ became a norm and ‘conspicuous consumption’, or the display of status via consumption, spread beyond the upper echelons to the ‘new rich’ of this time (Veblen, 1899). However, research has shown that this behaviour is shared amongst other socio-economic groups (Beder, 2004). Irresponsible lending and spending eventually led to the Stock Market crash of 1929 and triggered the Great Depression. The second-wave of consumerism in the US was the result of the post-WWII economic boom, and the countering of restrictive wartime practices, prompting the expansion of luxury lifestyles. The era was defined by the proliferation of credit markets and the suburbanisation of America (Cross, 2002). The advertising market grew, and the dream of the suburban house adorned with the latest material items (i.e., televisions) was normalised. The latter part of the 20th century brought continued expansion of this dream; the onset of

neoliberal policymaking encouraged the aspiration of individual material success, underscored by the meritocracy myth, and free-market policies of choice and competition were promoted as beneficial to the consumer (Trentmann, 2016).

Today, excessive consumption has become the norm within the contemporary American lifestyle, defined by fast fashion, fast food, and large homes and cars. The promotion of a dream of prosperity and success reinforces this practice of excessive consumerism, underscored by conspicuous consumption tendencies and a ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ mentality. Admittedly, this is a mentality prevalent in other countries in the Global North, specifically Australia and Canada, both of which have large average-sized homes (Australia, 231 m² (2475 ft²); Canada, 204 m² (2200 ft²)) and, notably, have seen the onset of the THL in recent years. These countries are defined by high rates of debt, with Canada’s household debt-to-GDP being the highest in the G7 at nearly 100%, and the US is at 79.9%, while Australia sits at 122% (Hays, 2018). Unsurprisingly, these countries have some of the highest rates of CO₂ emissions per capita (the US, 14.95 m tonnes; Canada, 14.91 m tonnes; and Australia, 17.22 m tonnes) (IEA, 2017). While the rise in household debt in the US decreased as a result of the Great Recession between 2008 and 2013, it reached an all-time high in 2018 at \$13.2 trillion, while personal savings sits at 2.4%, one of its lowest levels (Hays, 2018). Thus, suggesting that Americans, supported by political and corporate rhetoric, have continued to accrue debt at exorbitant rates, perhaps not learning a lesson from the Great Recession.

However, minimalism and simplification lifestyles have been on the rise, alongside the THL, especially among Millennials (Rodriguez, 2017). Minimalism, and similar lifestyles (i.e., simplification, downshifting, anti-consumption), have seen increased attention and interest in the form of podcasts (The Minimalists, The Simple Show, The Slow Home Podcast), books (Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, Joshua Becker’s *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own*), television shows (Tidying Up, The Minimalist, Happy), and social media accounts (Instagram: The Simplicity Movement, Minimalism Life, Minimal Mess). These lifestyles gained popularity out of the need to restrict and sacrifice amidst the Great Recession and have continued to define consumption tendencies for some, further reviewed in section 2.6.2. This dichotomous context, of continued excess and increased debt and minimalistic tendencies ignited by the Great

Recession, defines the complexities of the contemporary American dream and the situation from which the THL arose and exists.

Next, a working definition of the American dream ethos is developed to understand those in the THL, and their pursuit of homeownership and consumptive tendencies, under contemporary governing mechanisms.

2.3.5 Defining the American dream

Despite the utilisation of this ethos to standardise success, economise the individual, and govern understandings of the ‘self’ (Chomsky, 2017; Brown, 2015), there is no single American dream. Rather individuals attach their own successes and experiences to the realisation of this dream, while claims of being better off are dependent on a relative comparison point (i.e. being better off than your parents, than people in your old country, or than neighbours). Essentially, the array of meanings attached to this ethos is the result of the diversity of aspirations pursued under the ever-changing allowances and agendas of the socio-political and economic context. Under contemporary neoliberal governance, ‘being aspirational’ is deemed as an essential quality ‘of the ideal citizen-subject’, one ‘willing to strive towards (socially sanctioned) goals through continual self-improvement’ (Spohrer et al., 2018, p. 329). However, aspirations are dependent on age, class, race, ethnicity, value systems, religion, and intergenerational and familial discourses (Hauhart, 2016). Yet fundamentally, homeownership has been normalised as the aspirational tenure of choice under the American dream ethos (Shlay, 2006). Scholarship on aspiration, which is used as a mechanism to steer self-governance and the pursuit of a ‘project of the self’, is further reviewed in section 2.6 as it relates to governing housing tendencies. For the purposes of this research, key components of this ethos are clarified.

In order to understand the ways in which this ethos is used, it is crucial to consider two components:

- (1) What is involved in the pursuit of this dream (i.e. hard work, self-motivation, talent, aspiration and innovation) AND
- (2) What will be accrued once this dream is realised (freedom, self-determination, prosperity, happiness and material accumulation)

Additionally, this research argues that the contemporary American dream is threefold in nature:

(A) A notion of prosperity (the meritocracy myth): The American dream results in prosperity and upward social mobility, achieved through hard work, drive, talent and innovation.

(B) A notion of freedom, fulfilment, and superiority: The American dream is inclusive of being free from and free to, self-determination, fulfilment, individualism, the pursuit of happiness; the achievement results in a superior or optimal existence.

(C) A notion of excess (the contemporary dream): The American dream has become a dream of a grandiose lifestyle funded by the debt market. The meritocracy myth has supported the onset of this version as the pursuit of prosperity and upward social mobility has ignited an excessive consumer society. Traditional homeownership is fundamental to this component.

Notably, the American dream is not strictly a dream that takes place in the United States. Under modern neoliberal capitalism, it is a global dream of prosperity and material accumulation. For example, under the Thatcher administration in the UK in the 1980s the onset of the 'Right to Buy' scheme, which continues today in England (no longer available in Scotland as of August 2016), looked to steer and normalise homeownership in order to drive the maximisation of homeownership and to standardise success (Karn et al., 1985; Murie, 1986; Forrest et al., 1990). The United States, however, is a leader in promoting the contemporary lifestyle of excessive consumerism (Stearns, 2016; Humphery, 2009; Paek and Zhongdang Pan, 2004). Moreover, historically the United States has been an idealised place of prosperity, an aspirational location for many non-Americans in pursuit of economic stability and wealth (Hauhart, 2016).

This ethos has passed through various phases, though not sequentially and not in an eliminatory sense. Therefore, arguably all three components are important to this ethos within contemporary considerations. This tripartite nature of the American dream ethos, one of the meritocracy myth, individualism and freedom, superiority, and grandiose consumption is embedded in the pursuit of traditional housing (Harvey, 2012). Socio-political rhetoric suggests that the American dream represents an aspirational superior existence, one that should be perpetually sought. However, recent scholarship has indicated that under contemporary neoliberalism, the American dream is fading (Chetty et al., 2017), is forcing significant compromises (Altisource, 2017), and that an apparent tension exists in rhetoric

versus reality (Brown & Brown, 2015). The THL arose in the midst of and perhaps as a result of such pressures, and this is empirically explored in subsequent chapters.

Next, section 2.4 positions the US housing context within this understanding, and includes an investigation of the normalisation and commodification of the pursuit of housing, the onset of the housing crisis, and the continuation of a housing crisis under the Trump administration.

2.4 The neoliberalisation of homeownership

The contemporary pursuit of the American dream is inseparable from traditional homeownership, underpinned by neoliberal policymaking and discourses that suggest this as the desirable and aspirational way to be housed (Harvey, 2012). Indeed, neoliberal governance in the US has a longstanding homeownership objective, as evidenced by policy interventions over the last few decades (Shlay, 2006). Policymaking irresponsibly allowed access to the mortgage market, thus igniting the global financial crisis. This homeownership objective is underscored by the hyper-commodification and normalisation of this aspirational tenure (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). The contemporary housing context in the United States is reviewed here to support an investigation of the place from which the THL emerged. This section presents a brief overview of housing policy in section 2.4.1. It then moves on to discuss the normalisation and commodification of the dream of homeownership in section 2.4.2. then, in section 2.4.3, the 2008 housing crisis and ‘recovery’ is explored. Finally, section 2.4.4 presents the current state of housing policy under the Trump administration. This investigation provides an exploration of the ‘points’ from which dwellers entered the THL, and describes the potential significance of such a housing opportunity on future housing trajectories.

2.4.1 US housing policy interventions

US government policy has promoted homeownership for decades, using tax incentives, regulation of residential mortgage markets and economic development programmes to support mortgage financing towards owning a home (Shlay, 2006; Cannato, 2010; Carliner, 1998). While homeownership policies were directed at middle- to upper-income households for much of the twentieth century, in the 1990s homeownership for low-income households began to be promoted (Shlay, 2006). Federal programmes included: the HOME Investment Partnership Programme enacted in 1990, which provides states with federal funds to support

homeownership assistance for low-income homeowners; the Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Programme (SHOP) (1996), which grants funds to non-profits to push homeownership for low-income persons/families; and the Mortgage Revenue Bond Programme which subsidises homeownership. The George W. Bush administration was defined by an aggressive housing agenda and desire to strengthen the housing market, with policies such as the Single Family Affordable Housing Tax Credit (2003) and the American Dream Downpayment Assistance Act (2003). Largely, in an attempt to upscale homeownership, these policies were implemented to decrease costs and financial barriers to access a mortgage. Policies to support and expand the pursuit of homeownership were coupled with deregulation of the mortgage industry, easing notions of risk around default, and expansion of services to allow for the low-income lending market (Schwartz, 2010). The booming economy and low interest rates eased access for low-income families, whereby homeownership increased five percent within this grouping from the 1990s to early 2000s, peaking in 2004 at 69% of the total population (Herbert et al., 2005; Buckley and Schwartz, 2011).

Around the mid-2000s, low-income lending expanded even further to riskier borrowers, including no- and low-deposit and subprime mortgages (loans with interest rates at least 3% higher than market rates) (Shlay, 2006). These policies were directed through private lenders, resulting in borrowers that had less access to information and were thus disempowered. These nonbank mortgage lenders had minimal restrictions on terms and types of loans. As lending became riskier, no new regulation was implemented (Schwartz, 2010; Drew, 2013). Therefore, policymaking that increased accessibility and attempted to shift discourses around risk supported the homeownership objective of modern governing institutions. These housing policies supported the pursuit of homeownership as credit instalment institutions allowed access for those otherwise unable to buy a home, often preying upon the vulnerable (i.e. subprime lending) (Canova, 2008; Harvey, 2012). With the fall of house prices in 2006 came loan defaults and repossessions, first with subprime borrowers, then conventional prime mortgage borrowers (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2010), thus resulting in the collapse of the housing markets, the subsequent devastation of financial markets, and the onset of the Great Recession (Drew, 2013).

2.4.2 The normalised and commodified dream of homeownership

Contemporary neoliberal discourses, underscored by policy interventions, use the American dream to normalise the need to aspire towards and continually pursue a life of prosperity and material wealth. Homeownership is entrenched within this pursuit. Indeed, political rhetoric connects homeownership to the pursuit of the American dream and notions of safety, comfort, security, longevity, aspiration, freedom, family, and others. The following examples presented in Table 2.2 highlight this language involved in the normalisation and optimisation of homeownership in the United States.

Table 2.2 Examples of homeownership political discourse

| Example | Source |
|--|---|
| ‘Fundamental to the American dream is somewhere to call home – a safe and welcoming ‘anchor place’ where families are raised and memories are formed.’ | Millennial Housing Commission Report May 2002: 3 |
| ‘A part of economic security is owning your own home. Part of being a secure American is to encourage homeownership. So somebody can say, this is my home, welcome to my home.’ | President George W. Bush: speech promoting homeownership June 2002 |
| ‘More Americans will know the joy of scratching the child’s height on the door of their new home – with pencil, of course.’ | President Barack Obama: speech on housing crisis recovery August 2013 |
| ‘For generations of Americans, owning a home has been an essential element in achieving the American dream. Homeownership is often the foundation of security and prosperity for families and communities and an enduring symbol of American freedom.’ | President Donald Trump: proclamation for National Homeownership Month 31 st of May, 2017 |

However, due to oppressive neoliberal policies that support ever-growing socio-economic disparities, most are unable to achieve this ‘optimal’ dream (Harvey, 2012). In the modern era housing is an exchange commodity, seen as a privilege not a right. The deregulation and financialisation of housing in the latter part of the twentieth century until the present day resulted in ‘hyper-commodification’ in which powerful elites attained more housing. This limited access to middle- and lower-income individuals, in turn increasing rental prices (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Despite this, modern liberal democracies hegemonically

maintain homeownership as the responsible, optimal, and natural housing choice, superior to renting (Gurney, 1999; Rowlands and Gurney, 2000; Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McIntyre and McKee, 2012; McKee et al., 2017). Furthermore, normalisation tactics around homeownership suggest the superiority of owning one's house as an investment, implying irresponsibility in renting (Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008). This is a form of branding within the commodified housing market to differentiate between the acceptable and desirable, and the deviant (Flint and Rowlands, 2003). Those unable to pursue and maintain this investment of homeownership have been found to have a 'double disadvantage', as these individuals experience exclusion from this societal norm while the lack of this asset increases their chances of poverty in old age (Dewilde and Raeymaeckers, 2008).

Furthermore, housing as a commodity is used to suggest social belonging and is attached to one's cultural capital (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984). Products that are deemed cultural commodities are intentionally assigned meanings and associations (Isin and Wood, 1999). Bauman (1997) argues that this is endorsed by the post-modern values of individual freedom, self-realisation and pleasure, whereby those unable to pursue this livelihood or consume in this manner are considered 'flawed consumers' within society. Linking to Bauman's (1997) work, discourses attach notions of being 'flawed' consumers of housing to those unable to participate in traditional homeownership (Flint, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). Further, the size, style, and location of one's house 'is an integral part of the power structure in society' (Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004, p. 25). Yet, as the nature of neoliberal housing policy places evermore restrictions on the ability to 'choose' these aspects, identity creation and emblems of social belonging have moved to the interior, whereby home décor acts as a means to express and develop the 'self' (Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004). These notions of individuality, identity construction, and superior ways of being, attached to the symbolic nature of home, uphold the normalisation and valorisation of the pursuit of homeownership under the American dream ethos.

For many, the contemporary American dream is defined by excessive material accumulation, overtly seen in the onset of 'McMansions'. This name, coined in the 1980s, makes the comparison between the construction of ostentatious mass-produced, homogenous, poorly designed houses, and mass-produced fast-food (i.e. McDonalds) (Nasar et al., 2007). This

trend sits within the ‘McDonaldization of society’, as suggested by Ritzer (2001). For many, these houses and their ascribed ‘super-sized’ opulence have become entrenched in the pursuit of the American dream (Ritzer, 2001). It is perhaps the most glaring result of the ways in which a hyper-commodified good can become a hyperbolised version of itself, yet this is the version of homeownership many pursue (Nasar et al., 2007).

Together these examples highlight the embedded nature of homeownership within modern society and the mechanisms used to govern the consumption of housing (Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; Gurney, 1999). This links to the governing of conduct by modern democracies towards continually working on the ‘self’ through the pursuit of socially acceptable norms (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

2.4.3 The housing crisis and ‘recovery’

The ‘hyper-commodification’ of housing and normalisation tactics used to promote homeownership underscored the 2008 housing crisis (Immergluck, 2009), as individuals were using irresponsible lending schemes to purchase homes they aspired to, yet simply could not afford (Demyanyk and Van Hemert, 2011; Immergluck, 2009; Pezzuto, 2012). Policy interventions were justified through social norms attached to owning a home as, according to Drew and Herbert (2013), policymaking and the construction of social norms around optimal and aspirational ways of being housed reinforce one another. The promise of wealth accumulation and social benefits from homeownership was exposed as a fallacy during the housing crisis. For instance, Drew and Herbert (2013) argue that policy interventions that allowed risky access to homeownership for lower-income individuals were designed to increase mortgage financing, not to provide sustained homeownership potentialities. The reality of ‘what homeownership does and why are not well understood because of difficulties disentangling what homeownership means’ (Shlay, 2006, p. 511). Fundamentally, the American dream ethos has promoted aspirations for homeownership underscored by neoliberal governing that use commodification of housing to normalise and classify types of housing and thus types of citizens (Flint and Rowlands, 2003; Raco, 2009, 2011). Neoliberal policies intentionally and irresponsibly allowed access to this ‘dream’ way of being housed (Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

The economic and housing crisis left many devastated by financial uncertainty, extreme debt, job loss and reduced income. Many of those that remained as homeowners endured the burden of maintaining this lifestyle under crippling circumstances (Drew and Herbert, 2013). Subsequently, homeownership ‘became singularly associated with the forces undermining the US economy and wreaking havoc with global capitalism’ (Shlay, 2015, p. 560). Yet by 2013 the ‘comeback’ of the housing market was praised within politics and the media (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2013) as the basic policies that underscored it remained. Housing as an investment was touted once again, and it was suggested that the American dream had recovered (Shlay, 2015). However, as Madden and Marcuse (2016) argue, ‘the contemporary housing system is unsustainable by its very nature’ (p. 11). The affordable housing crisis is a consequence of neoliberal policymaking working as it is intended (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Housing costs continue to increase due to inflating property values yet income growth remains static, resulting in gentrification, displacement, homelessness, evictions, and so on (Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

The commodification of housing whereby housing is used as an investment asset within global financial markets has perpetuated the housing crisis, with no suggestion of it slowing down (Rolnik, 2013). Due to this, despite post-recession ‘recovery’, the housing crisis remains. In fact, homelessness continues to increase in the wealthiest parts of the world, such as North America and Europe, while the rapidly urbanising cities of the Global South are seeing the worst (Farha, 2017). An unaffordable housing market is not strictly a megacity phenomenon (i.e. Hong Kong, London, New York), but affects smaller cities as well, such as Manchester, Barcelona, Rome, Stockholm, Birmingham, and Leeds (Cox and Pavletich, 2018; O’Sullivan, 2016). Urbanisation is a major driver of high housing prices, with cities unable to provide necessary housing stock due to restrictive land use laws, constraints of geography, and NIMBYism, as well as gentrification, company relocations to city centres, and corporation real estate investment largely resulting in housing for the uber-wealthy (Florida & Schneider, 2018). This housing crisis has resulted in the onset of other forms of alternative housing, for example communal housing in Stockholm (Nevrokopli, 2018), collaborative housing in Auckland (Trapani, 2018), co-housing in Hamburg and Gothenburg (Scheller & Thorn, 2018), container homes in Australia (Islam et al., 2016), homes from straw bale in the UK (Walker, Thomson, & Maskell, 2016), and micro-housing in the US (Carter, 2015; Wang, 2016). This understanding locates the THL within the global housing

crisis, and relates this research beyond its immediate focus to wider explorations of responses to the neoliberalisation of housing.

A review of the implications of the THL emerging within this context is one of the goals of this research. As the THL has continued in the decade after the recession, so has the affordable housing crisis under the Trump administration, and this is further reviewed next in section 2.4.4 to position the continued growth of the THL.

2.4.4 Housing policy under the Trump administration

The THL began its rise prior to this presidency, yet an affordable housing crisis remains and policymaking has become more restrictive, resulting in the continued popularity of this alternative housing options. The current housing crisis is different than its predecessor, which was ignited by irresponsible housing practices. Instead, lack of construction spending during the Great Recession has resulted in a 60-year housing stock low, and from scarcity comes inflation (Kusisto, 2018). Due to this, house prices are high, both to rent and own.

Homeownership rates for those in their late 20s and 30s have plunged almost 10% from the previous generations' homeownership rates at the same age (Urban Institute, 2018). Trump's tax reform, which went into effect in December 2017, decreased opportunities for mortgage interest and property tax reductions. In addition, this administration is seeking to overhaul the mortgage finance system, directed at ending federal control of the secondary mortgage institutions, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (Borak & Vazquez, 2019). The White House, in a memo released on 23rd of March, 2019, stated that these reforms are looking to reduce taxpayer risk, expand the role of the private sector, and improve access to sustainable homeownership (Trump, 2019). Essentially, the goal is to reduce the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) regulation of the origination and servicing of mortgages, while the new CFPB director has proposed ending affordable housing goals set out by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Considering the federal government currently supports 70% of all residential mortgages (Borak & Vazquez, 2019), this is another example of neoliberal policymaking taking precedent over the protection of citizens.

Further, under the Trump administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) suspended Obama-era fair housing laws that fought discrimination and segregation and scaled-back investigations of such instances (Yentel, 2018). HUD has

established laws to make it easier for local authorities to impose harsh work-requirements on those receiving housing benefits. The administration proposed steep cuts to HUD which, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, would result in more evictions, homelessness, and disproportionately impact vulnerable seniors, families, those with disabilities, and people of colour. Proposed cuts include those to community development block grants, Native American housing block grants, and the HOME Investment Partnership program, which provides grants to state and local government for low-income housing (Yentel, 2018). While many of the proposed cuts did not pass through Congress, these attempts highlight the Trump administration's stance on affordable housing.

Despite restrictive policymaking, the Trump administration has pushed a homeownership agenda. Trump's statement naming June, 2017 National Homeownership Month touted the 'joys', 'benefits', 'pride' and 'stability' that comes with homeownership. The statement continued, using American dream rhetoric, 'for millions of Americans, owning a home is an important step toward financial security and achieving the American Dream' (Trump, 2017). As Archer (2014) highlights, the resilience and durability of the myth of American dream is remarkable. Indeed, it has thrived through other instances of economic uncertainty, used as a mechanism to bond and develop a common direction (Archer, 2014). Therefore, it seems that this ethos will continue to be utilised and upheld as a driving force, underlying the commodification of housing and the normalisation of homeownership.

This section provided the housing policy context from which the THL arose and continues to grow. Next, Foucauldian neoliberal governmentality is explored in order to further position these neoliberal governing mechanisms that have underscored the pursuit of homeownership and thus the onset of an alternative housing option such as the THL. With this theoretical understanding, the THL can be investigated at a greater depth, looking beyond the superficial to underlying happenings.

2.5 Neoliberal governmentality

This section presents Foucault's theory of governmentality (1991) and subsequent developments of this work (specifically Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Brady, 2014, 2016; McKee, 2011, 2016; Flint, 2002, 2003; and others). The relevance of this scholarship was identified after exploring the increase in popularity of the THL amidst an affordable housing

and economic crisis. This section is meant to provide background to support the developed approach taken by this research, further elaborated in section 2.6 and summarised in section 2.7. In this section, a review of Foucauldian governmentality is provided in order to tell the ‘story’ of modern power relations (section 2.5.1). This research primarily relies on Foucault’s notion of ‘technologies of the self’, ‘which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves...’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). These technologies are utilised in advanced liberal democracies to steer individuals into self-governance (Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Rose’s (2000) contribution to the notion of ‘technologies of the self’ through his development of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ is presented in 2.5.2. Thereafter, the more recent developments in the ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methodological approaches to this area of study are explored in section 2.5.3 in order to justify the direction taken by this research (specifically, Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). This section aids in positioning the potential motivations for and underlying forces supporting the adoption and experience of the THL, especially considering the post-recession ‘rise’ and continued pursuit amidst an on-going housing crisis.

2.5.1 Foucauldian governmentality

The concept of governmentality departs from theories of centralised, top-down sovereign forms of power and moves to the understanding of government as the ‘conduct of conduct’, or an understanding of power as a ‘mode of action upon the action of others’ (Foucault, 1991, 1982, p. 221; Dean, 1999). As Dean (1999) clarifies, ‘to define government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ is to open up the examination of self-government or cases in which governor and governed are two aspects of the one actor’ (Dean, 1999, p. 19). Essentially, this explains how modern liberal democracies operate both through the ‘free’ individual and the regulation and modification of individual behaviour, while individuals are active in this process (Lemke, 2001). Foucault’s understanding of power, termed the ‘micro-physics’ of power, emphasises the need to look beyond state-centred explorations to a decentralised understanding of power that works through many institutions in society (Foucault, 1979). For Foucault the intent is to produce governable subjects through the use of the mechanisms spread throughout the social body, in order to regulate individual conduct by establishing norms and suggestions of defiant behaviour (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1979, 1982, 1984). For example, governing

practices divide individuals as homeowners and renters, suggesting an irresponsibility and inferiority in the latter, in order to drive the pursuit of homeownership (Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008). Relevantly, the THL offers a version of homeownership, an affordable means to counter the need to stay within the rental market. Clarity on the motivations for adoption, a primary goal of this research, will provide a more in-depth understanding as to how dwellers have been governed by such norms. This concept of governmentality introduced, for the first time, that modern liberal democracies were recognised to be operating in such a manner, establishing the groundwork for contemporary studies of modern political rationalities, today known as ‘neoliberalism’ (Brady, 2014).

While his early work focused on ‘technologies of power’ that work through dominant forces used to govern certain behaviours (for example in *Discipline and Punish*, 1979), Foucault is no structural determinist. As he claimed, his central concern was in fact to ‘create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 208). Therefore, Foucault’s late work focused on ‘technologies of the self’ used by the neoliberal mentality of rule to subjectify individuals through ‘governing at a distance’, whereby governing practices are applied to all aspects of life (Foucault, 1988). For example, governing practices are applied to non-monetisable aspects of life such as sexuality in order to steer identity formation around a ‘project of the self’. However, this is not an individual that is entirely self-determining. These self-practices are not developed by the individual but are the result of patterns imposed by culture and society (Foucault, 1988). Therefore, self-subjectification practices are practices or technologies that individuals use to understand themselves while being imposed upon (Foucault, 1988). Yet self-subjectification processes aid in establishing and defining new norms, as Foucault recognised the productive nature of power and the opportunity for individuals to be active in shaping their own subjectivities (McKee, 2009). This productive form of power allows for a consideration of resistance and activated agency whereby governing practices can be challenged and contested (McKee, 2011).

While Foucault’s personal stance on neoliberalism is a source of debate, with some attaching his public support of prominent neoliberals to his intellectual musings (Zamora & Behrent, 2016), his explanation of neoliberal governance has contributed markedly to contemporary understandings of power relations and rationalities. Relevantly, a Foucauldian lens has been

applied to subjectification around contemporary housing (for example Kear, 2013; Langley, 2007, 2008), reviewing the hegemonic model of homeownership. Indeed, housing is one of the basic contradictions of capitalism, witnessed in the tension between those that view it as a basic need, and those that attach to it circulation of capital; or the financialisation of housing versus housing rights and welfare policies (Harvey, 2012; Di Felicianantonio, 2016). As Di Felicianantonio (2016) argues, housing and real estate ‘represent a main domain of contention to the hegemonic forces of capital reproduction’ (p. 1207). Informed by Foucault’s understanding of the productive nature of power, Di Felicianantonio recognises subjectification as both *produced* and *productive*, thus emphasising and exposing these tensions in his analysis of post-recession squatting and indebtedness in Italy. Such explorations are used as precedent by this research in its investigation of the THL, whereby this ‘response’ to the housing crisis arose due to these tensions within contemporary power relations, and an examination of this duality as it relates to subjectification of dwellers is a primary focus of this research.

Several scholars, eager to investigate the emergence of the politics of the ‘new right’ in the late twentieth century, have made contributions to the development of Foucault’s work on governmentalities. Notable figures include Mitchell Dean, Peter Miller, Thomas Osbourne, and Nikolas Rose. Indeed, Miller and Rose’s (1990) seminal paper entitled ‘Governing economic life’ put forward a methodological approach exploring language as a technology and thus ‘technologies of governance’ that look to shape rationalities in order to expose governance beyond the state. They claimed that technologies of government ‘increasingly seek to act upon and instrumentalise the self-regulating propensities of the individual in order to ally them with socio-political objectives’ (Miller and Rose, 1999, p. 28). Rose’s (2000) notion of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’, developed within this context, is presented next.

2.5.2 Rose’s ethopower/ethopolitics

This section investigates Rose’s (2000) understanding of the governing of rationalities within his notion of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’. ‘Ethopower/ethopolitics’ refers to the ways in which individuals are ‘urged and incited to become ethical beings, to define and regulate themselves according to a moral code, to establish precepts for conducting or judging their lives, to reject or accept moral goals’ (Rose, 1996a, p. 64). Essentially, Rose’s (2000) ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ argues that governing practices aid in the construction of individual

rationalities and thus identity formation through the modern neoliberal push for the creation of an active, responsible, and self-governing population in order to reduce reliance on the state. Rooted in Foucault's notion of self-subjectification, which works through 'technologies of the self', governing practices look to influence values and beliefs that suggest self-reliance and responsibility as the ethical way to be (Foucault, 1982, 1988, 1991; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). The 'contemporary regime of the self', which Rose terms 'the genealogy of subjectification', refers to the practices by which people understand, act upon and relate to themselves (Rose, 1996b, p. 22). These 'genealogies of the self' are directly linked to the ways in which people plan their lives, consume, regulate, judge, problematise and so on (Rose, 1996a/b). Individual construction of identity occurs around the ways in which subjectivities are either affirmed or denied through these processes (Rose, 1996a/b). Modern liberal rationalities of rule look to infiltrate all aspects of life in order to 'govern at a distance' and create autonomous citizens in pursuit of being the best version of the 'self' (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Subjects' identity formation, reproduction, and valorisation of these identities are the result of governing practices that promote a 'project of the self', constantly in need of work (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Based on this understanding, the goal is to gain a theoretically-informed understanding of how dwellers came to and recognise themselves around the THL. Indeed, contemporary rationalities promote a self-reliant individual capable of taking care of one's self and one's livelihood (i.e., housing), and in pursuit of a better 'self'.

For example, the American dream ethos, underscored by the meritocracy myth and notions of individuality and self-determination, is used to promote self-governance through placing responsibility on the individual to chase a superior 'self' – a dream of success and material wealth – in order to maximise the population and promote self-reliance and hard work (Foucault, 1979, 1982, 1988; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Brown, 2015). This creates a population ever-chasing this dream, working on their 'project of the self', as the myth of American dream persists (Harvey, 2012), thus constructing understandings of the 'self', or subjectivities, within these restrictive parameters. Technologies of responsibilisation, self-work, and individuality are utilised, under the guise of aspiring towards the American dream, to create a productive population less reliant on the state. In order to pursue the 'project of the self', including the superior homeownership, individuals enter themselves into an entrapping system of debt management. These institutions reduce the individual to their economic value

and activity (Brown, 2015). The management of debt strongarms individuals into financial responsibility through coercing dependence on a system of payments and artificial scoring tools (credit scores) (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1999b; Lazzarato, 2009). Therefore, these individuals are ‘governed at a distance’ since they cannot break free from the debt system. After all, when individuals are trapped in a mortgage, they cannot escape the neoliberal mechanism (Lazzarato, 2009). Neoliberal governing practices steer individuals into pursuing a crucial commodity, the commodity of housing, and thus the debt market, via the normalisation of homeownership. This normalisation of homeownership has been key to the neoliberal mentality of rule promoting self-governance, whereby owning a home and signing onto the mortgage system assigns the responsibility of housing to the individual (Foucault, 1984, 1988; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). The THL offers an opportunity for the normalised homeownership, thus a version of the American dream, and a means to take responsibility over one’s housing, therefore, justifying the theoretical stance of this research.

While Rose’s (2000) development of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ is critical to furthering understandings around modern governing practices, ‘traditional’ governmentalities scholars (i.e. Rose, Miller, Dean, and others) have been accused of being ‘unFoucauldian’ in their deployment of these explorations (Rutherford, 2007; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2009). Indeed, Foucault recognised the productive nature of power, while these traditionalist interpretations seemingly disregard empirical reality and tend towards top-down, deterministic explanations, at times (Stenson, 2005; McKee, 2009, 2011). These approaches rely on ‘discursive governmentalities’, or the sole use of discourse analysis of documents to investigate governing practices, rather than the incorporation of empirical actualities and the messiness of power relations at the micro-level (McKee, 2011; Clarke, 2008). An exploration of and the recent response to this critique is reviewed next to explain the methodological approach used by this research to examine the THL.

2.5.3 Ethnographies of governmentality

Ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic approaches to governmentalities are used by this thesis as, relevantly, these can reflect a ‘particular geographic and temporal contexts within which practices or technologies of government unfold’ (Brady, 2016, p. 5). This approach allows for actualities of governing practices to be revealed, as subjects are not always produced as intended (Clarke, 2007). Subjects have the potential to exercise power and ‘contest from below’ (McKee, 2011, p. 2). Indeed, the THL arose and exists at many points of contestation,

and provides an opportunity to break out of traditional debt systems, traditional housing, and consumer culture. Therefore, as presented, this research is looking to examine how these governing practices ‘happen’ around the THL and the extent to which dwellers have or have not been governed into this ‘choice’ by the neoliberal mentality of rule. Importantly, an ethnographies of governmentality approach counters the archival methods of traditional governmentalities scholars (i.e. Nikolas Rose, Mitchell Dean, Peter Miller, Ulrich Brockling, and Thomas Osbourne), who are often accused of neglecting to examine human agency.

According to Brady (2016), this approach is developed from Forsey’s (2010) notion of ‘ethnographic imaginary’, whereby the goal of this ‘imaginary’ is to look to specific places and temporal contexts to expose technologies of governance. These ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methods do not represent a specific methodology or necessarily hold strictly to traditional ethnographic approaches of participant observations (Brady, 2016). This approach counters the frequently acknowledged issues with traditional studies of governmentalities. The primary critique is the tendency to use neoliberalism as a globalizing ‘cookie-cutter typification or explanation’, thus often resulting in monolithic, descriptive and linear analysis (Rose et al., 2006, p. 97; Brady, 2014). Placing neoliberalism within a ‘more or less constant master category that can be used both to understand and to explain all manner of political programs across a wide variety of settings’ (Rose et al., 2006, p. 97). Indeed, several traditional Foucauldian governmentality theorists have recognised the shortcomings of their prior explorations in recent publications (see, for example, Rose et al., 2006 and O’Malley and Valverde, 2014). However, as Brady (2016) points out, these traditionalists have continued to use archival and documentary methods, trying to address these issues simply through avoiding grand theory narratives. Rose (1999a) suggests that merging traditional arts and humanities methods, such as ethnography, with governmentalities thinking is not complementary.

However, the utilisation of ‘ethnographic imaginary’ approaches looks to do just this through the incorporation of non-archival methods, allowing for the exposure of problems and discourses that would have otherwise remained invisible (Lippert, 2005; Brady, 2016; Collier, 2013). Ultimately, the inclusion of ethnographies of governmentality enables the avoidance of being deterministic and static in understanding social transformations (Brady, 2014) thus revealing the actualities of subject formation within a review of ‘everyday’ social

life. Brady (2014) argues that this approach actually aligns more with Foucault's interpretation of governmentality and practices of the 'self', as presented in his later lectures. McKee (2009) agrees, noting that an empirical review of 'mentalities of rule in their local context' represents a return to Foucauldian thinking and allows for the considerations of governable subjects being active in these processes (p. 467). This critique does not negate the work of these traditional governmentality scholars, rather it allows for a consideration of their work within empirical contexts. For example, providing precedent for this research, Rose's 'ethopower/ethopolitics' (2000) has been reviewed specifically to housing, relying on more non-archival approaches to expose resistance and activated agency (specifically see Flint and Rowlands, 2003; Flint, 2002, 2003; McKee, 2011; and McIntyre and McKee, 2008) (returned to in section 2.6.1).

Furthermore, to position potentialities of resistance and agency around the THL through a review of the 'micro-physics' of power, it is critical to understand Foucault's notion of 'counter-conducts', or individual efforts at crafting the 'self' to interrupt forces governing or constructing individuals (Foucault, 2007). Foucault (2007) argues 'counter-conducts' are about 'the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price' (p. 75). Therefore, resistance is not a total rejection of government, but instead not accepting being governed in this manner, by these people, or for this purpose. Indeed, 'where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1978, p. 95-96). Resistance happens when new subjectivities are created, identities are reconstituted, and limits of freedom are engaged with and pushed (McNay, 1994). This understanding is joined with the ethnographic methodological approach to lead an exploration of how subjects do not always materialise as intended by governing practices (Clarke, 2007). Or explicitly, how dwellers may not accept being steered blindly, but instead can develop themselves as those that act against certain aspects of being governed in this way, as power is productive.

Next, in section 2.6, the THL is further situated within these understandings of governing practices promoted by modern liberal democracies that push for self-governing individuals. An exploration is presented into how individuals are 'governed from a distance' into taking responsibility over their housing towards the superior, aspirational tenure of homeownership.

In addition, governing practices that impact patterns of consumption around an alternative lifestyle such as the THL are reviewed.

2.6 Governing the THL

This section brings together the review of the literature to expose how neoliberal governmentalities, or the governing of rationalities, have shaped contemporary understandings and patterns around housing. This allows for an investigation of the context from which the THL emerged, as well as the how subjectivities may be shaped around the adoption of this lifestyle and experience of living in this manner. Following the ROs, this exploration (1) situates the THL within wider scholarship around the pursuit of homeownership in the current era of neoliberal governance (section 2.6.1) and (2) positions the ‘everyday’ consumptive aspects of this housing option and its claims of challenging consumptive tendencies and traditional consumer culture (section 2.6.2). Therefore, this section provides a starting point for the empirical investigation of the THL dweller. As in the methodological approach of this research, explorations of the ‘messiness’ of governing practices allow for consideration of actualities of subjectivity formation around the THL (Brady, 2014; Clarke, 2007).

2.6.1 Governing homeownership: towards the THL

The goal of contemporary neoliberal mentalities of rule is to take the burden off the state by empowering citizens to be entrepreneurial and responsible, operating through the freedom of these governable subjects (Clark et al., 2007; Cruikshank, 1999; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Raco, 2009, 2011). This section brings together the following scholarly explorations in order to position taking responsibility over one’s housing and the pursuit of the superior tenure of choice, homeownership. This aids in exposing the governing practices that underscore the THL. This investigation of the THL is rooted in Rose’s (2000) ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’, or the understanding that governing practices look to influence values and beliefs that suggest self-reliance and responsibility as the ethical way to be. This is rooted in the acknowledgment of a ‘contemporary regime of the self’ which ‘governs individuals at a distance’ through a ‘project of the self’ (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Additionally, other scholarship that has reviewed mechanisms used to govern individuals into optimising the ‘self’ in order to take responsibility off the state is relied upon, specifically, Raco’s (2009) exploration of neoliberal policies that push for an ‘aspirational

citizen' directed towards specific ways of being, and Cruikshank's (1999) work on poverty and empowerment which highlights the use of these notions to motivate individuals to 'act'. Further, Rose's work on the governing of freedom is utilised, presented in *Power of Freedom* (1999b), as the success of these self-governing tactics are embedded within notions of being 'free' and self-determining. Foucauldian scholarship that has developed understandings of housing using Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics', such as Flint and Rowlands (2003), Flint (2002, 2003), McKee (2011), and McIntyre and McKee (2008), is also utilised.

Normalisation tactics steer the 'free', self-enterprising and empowered individual to be active in the process of taking responsibility over housing, while suggesting that homeownership is attached to stability, morality, financial success, social status and security (Kemeny, 1981; Drew, 2013; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Cruikshank, 1999). As explored above, policy interventions and rhetoric reinforce and are reinforced by social norms around the pursuit of housing and the superiority of homeownership (Drew, 2013). McKee et al. (2017) found in a UK study of rural and urban areas, young people (termed 'Generation Rent') have adopted these notions of homeownership as the 'ideal' form of housing consumption. They were found to identify it as a marker of social mobility, an important financial asset, and as a source of security. However, as is the nature of the ethnographies of governmentalities approach, how subjects contested from below and did not materialise as expected was exposed (Flint, 2003; McKee, 2016; McKee et al., 2017). Young people were determined to resist norms around homeownership by developing the understanding of homeownership as a 'fallacy of choice' (McKee et al., 2017). Additionally, McKee (2016) exposed the ways individuals challenged dominant norms specific to empowerment of housing communities to reduce welfare dependency (McKee, 2016). This scholarship acts as a precedent for this research approach in exposing resistance and agency around the THL.

Notions of freedom, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and self-reliance, driven by aspirational ways of being and a 'project of the self', uphold the American dream ethos, which in turn underscores the pursuit of homeownership. As noted, this dream is not strictly an *American* dream; contemporary neoliberal mentalities of rule look to make this a global dream. For example, scholarship has revealed the ways in which UK policy takes advantage of the pursuit of upward social mobility to govern aspirational citizens, especially targeted at young people and 'problem' citizens (Raco, 2009, 2011; Spohrer et al., 2018; Berrington et al., 2016). Joining

with Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics', this promotion of 'aspiration' is directed at the morality of the individual not to be 'parasitic', suggesting their failures are the result of not grasping opportunities. This 'aspiration' rhetoric is used as a self-governing mechanism to push for an active and moral citizen who places the responsibility of success on oneself (Francis & Hey, 2009, p. 226; Raco, 2009, 2011; Spohrer et al., 2018), whereby the 'existence of aspiring citizens is fundamental to the operation and reproduction of the capitalist system as aspirational individuals act as acquisitive consumers and enterprising subjects' (Raco, 2011, p. 49).

Similarly, Cruikshank (1999), who explored the US context, argues that the 'will to empower' targets the 'poor' to become active and participatory, whereby these governable subjects are mobilised and empowered to take control over their lives. Although, as Cruikshank (1999) explains, this is not always ill intentioned, it further divides those willing and able to 'act' from those unable. These 'inactive' individuals are often then problematised (Flint, 2004). Ultimately, the goal is to empower citizens to be active thus reducing their dependence on the state, and suggest the need to take responsibility over their own future (Cruikshank, 1999). Rose's (1996a) work on the 'enterprising self' highlights how individuals are driven to see this as a way to self-improve and work on themselves, 'eliminate dependency' as this is viewed as 'flawed', and realise one's true 'self' (p. 160). This happens by steering conduct at the 'everyday' level to aspire towards this optimal 'self' in all aspects of life (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000, 2001). These mechanisms suggest that being self-reliant and in continuous pursuit of a normalised 'dream', or aspirational version of success, is the optimal way to be and the way to avoid being considered 'inactive', 'dependent', 'parasitic', or 'problematic'.

According to Rose (1999a), these governing mechanisms and suggestions of optimising the 'self' and pushing for an empowered and aspirational citizen work through the notion of freedom, as these governing practices are used to shape and regulate how people understand and practise their freedom. Presenting the guise of freedom is fundamental to strategies used to govern individuals 'from a distance' (Rose, 1999a; Miller and Rose, 2008; Brown, 2015; Cruikshank, 1996). One of the successes of the neoliberal era is the ability to govern by 'making people free' or making people 'feel' free (Rose 1999a). 'Governing from a distance' operates through the freedom of governable subjects (Miller and Rose, 2008; McKee, 2011). These subjects are shaped by governing practices that suggest 'being free' means acting responsibly and ethically, as argued by Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics'. Governing

freedom means pushing for the continuous pursuit of ‘being free’ within neoliberal policymaking, despite the ever-increasing restrictions around house, job, income, and so on. Therefore, notions of choice, freedom, control, autonomy, self-determination, and empowerment are used to support the maximisation and responsabilisation of an individual, central to neoliberal governance looking to create an ‘optimally’ productive population (Rose et al., 2006; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Brown, 2015).

Choice around housing has become ever-more constricted due to neoliberal policymaking (Clarke, 2007; Madden and Marcuse, 2016), as evidenced by the ‘Generation Rent’ cohort and suggestions of the traditional housing market being a ‘fallacy of choice’ in the current unstable economic era (McKee et al., 2017; Ronald and Kadi, 2017; Wood and Ong, 2012). Yet while the promotion of an empowered and self-determinant citizen is prevalent, housing choices outside of traditional homeownership are suggested to be ‘flawed’ (Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). Financial irresponsibility, perceived as deviance, is attached to not owning a home (Munro, 2007), the notion of ‘throwing away money’ is associated with renting (Gurney, 1999), and implications that an owned house is more of a home than a rented house are apparent (Ronald, 2008). These normalisation tactics highlight the restrictive ways in which housing is promoted. Indeed, choice around housing is contained within a commodified version of homeownership, shaping the opportunity for and expectations of owning one’s home. These governing practices steer the pursuit of housing, whereby the notion of taking responsibility over one’s house, despite increasing unaffordability (Madden and Marcuse, 2016), drives individuals to pursue a commodity that is deemed optimal.

This scholarship positions the empirical evidence found by this research, in particular, the underlying drivers that may steer dwellers toward this lifestyle. These understandings are used to explicitly ‘unwrap’ dweller experiences of the THL in subsequent chapters. Next, the THL is also promoted as offering an opportunity for a more sustainable housing option and as a means of countering consumer culture (Shafer, 2010; Anson, 2013). While the investigation of the sustainability of the THL is beyond the methodological capacity of this research, section 2.6.2 explores aspects related to patterns of consumption and the THL.

2.6.2 Governing patterns of consumption: the ethical and self-reliant consumer

This research approach reviews patterns of consumption in order to reveal how governing practices have shaped consumptive tendencies and informed the development of subjectivities (Brady, 2014). This research is interested in exposing claims of this housing ‘choice’ sitting outside of traditional consumer values and suggestions of it being a commodified version of sustainability (Anson, 2014). Scholarship on lifestyles similar to the THL (i.e. ethical consumption, anti-consumption, and voluntary simplification) is relied upon to approach this review of THL.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Foucauldian governmentality scholars sought to understand consumption in the postmodern era. While Foucault did not speak explicitly about consumption, the relationship is apparent (Flint, 2003). Today, consumption is inseparable from the creation of an ‘enterprising self’, while commodification has infiltrated daily life, reaching non-monetisable aspects in the name of choice and freedom (Brown, 2015). As Rose (1996a) argues, conduct is governed through operating ‘on a territory marked out by the vectors of identity, choice, consumption and lifestyle’ (p. 344). Essentially, the modern ‘enterprise’ society shapes conduct, as consumption is both a tool for creating and maintaining the ‘self’ as well as a mechanism to position the ‘self’ in society (Kleine et al., 1995; Flint, 2003). As Binkley argues, governing rationalities around consumption work through the desire to make oneself ‘more efficient, more productive, cleaner, more communicative, loving, civil, giving’ and so on (Binkley, 2006, p. 348). The optimal ways in which to consume are governed through the establishment of norms and suggestions of defiant behaviours. The symbolic nature of consumption, in which objects hold socio-cultural meanings (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Gabriel and Lang, 1995), aids in the pursuit of a ‘project of the self’, as objects and services are consumed in order to suggest a desirable version of the ‘self’ and other objects and services are avoided in order to distance the ‘self’ from aspects deemed undesirable (Gould et al., 1997). Exemplified by what some have called an ‘ethical-turn’ in consumption in recent years (Lewis and Potter, 2010; Binkley, 2006), this ‘ethicalization’ reinforces the neoliberal mentality of rule that places the responsibility on the individual to consume in an optimal way, in turn removing the ‘risks and uncertainties’ around consumption from the responsibility of the state (Binkley, 2006, p. 344).

Notions of freedom, or making individuals ‘feel free’ (Rose, 1999a), are upheld through suggestions around the autonomy, entrepreneurial possibilities, and choice offered to the

consumer subject within their pursuit of the ‘project of the self’. Essentially, then, freedom is found in the ability that consumption offers to allow oneself to ‘transform’ (Binkley, 2006). Furthermore, scholars have developed the idea that the promotion of the ‘citizen-consumer’ in modern liberal democracies is used to support the development of an active and self-determinant consumer (see for example Clarke, 2007; Clarke et al., 2007; Bevir and Trentmann, 2007). The ‘citizen’ and the ‘consumer’ were previously representative of two different ‘modes of governance’, with the citizen being a public identification, while the consumer is identified as private; or state versus market (Clarke, 2007, p. 98). However, choice arose with the onset of a consumer society under modern neoliberal politics, which ‘figured as the defining feature of the consumer experience’, being utilised to inspire an active ‘citizen-consumer’ (Clarke, 2007, p. 104). Clarke et al. (2007) argue that choice can foster both the development of the ‘self’ and social and civic awareness, for example, through moralising choices around consumption (for example, Fairtrade products). As Micheletti (2003) notes, this has brought forward instances of lifestyle modes of civic agency and citizenship, arguing this era has inspired ‘individualised collective action’ (p. 29). Yet others argue that civic responsibility has been reduced to individual choice and self-realisation, thus diminishing civic agency (Pringle and Thompson, 1999; Berlant, 1997; Binkley, 2006).

As reviewed above, traditional governmentality scholars have been criticised for providing monolithic, descriptive and linear analysis (Brady, 2014). With regard to consumption, Binkley (2006) argues that these traditionalists tend towards ‘broader rationalities of entrepreneurship and responsabilisation’, suggesting this creates a ‘productivist bias’ (p. 346). The need to consider agency and resistance within acts of consumption is evident, as it cannot be assumed that patterns of consumption are strictly the result of a non-reflexive consumer subject. This research investigates consumption through situating the THL within lifestyle choices that promote the reduction of consumption and/or living outside of traditional forms of consumption, including ‘voluntary simplification’ (McDonald et al., 2006; Shaw and Newholm, 2002), ‘anti-consumption’ (Lee and Ahn, 2016; Cherrier, 2009), ‘downshifting’ (Schor, 1999; Nelson et al., 2007), ‘ethical consumption’ (Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Barnett et al., 2005; Lewis and Potter, 2010) and ‘minimalism’ (Rodriguez, 2017; Dopierala, 2017). To clarify, anti-consumption is rejecting or resisting consuming in a certain way, for a multitude of reasons such as rejecting specific goods, services or brands (Lee et al., 2011), rejecting ‘mainstream’ consumerism (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004),

personal values such as environmental and societal concerns (Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Evans, 2011), or simple living (Black and Cherrier, 2010; Brown and Kasser, 2005; Iyer and Muncy, 2009). Downshifting, which goes hand-in-hand with voluntary simplification (Elgin, 1998), is the voluntary adoption of simplified living tendencies in order to have fewer expenses, less work, and more time (Schor, 1999; Nelson et al., 2007). Indeed, the THL purports to include aspects of all of these lifestyle choices. Similar to the THL, these have gained popularity in recent years (Rodriguez, 2017). Yet, scholarly considerations have highlighted the often problematic tendency in these lifestyle choices, accusing them of being another ‘mode of consumption’, elitist at heart (Dopierala, 2017), and mechanisms for the middle class to display ‘conscience consumption-credentials’ to feel less guilty (Lewis, 2011, p. 5; Littler, 2011). However, others have emphasised them as forms of resistance (Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Cherrier, 2009; Lee et al., 2011). These opposing viewpoints fit into considerations around the THL and the exploration of the actualities of patterns of consumption. While some have claimed ‘poverty appropriation’ (Westhale, 2015) and ‘environmental romanticism’ (Anson 2014), the potential for this lifestyle to offer a housing option that reduces consumption and environmental impact is evident (Anson, 2014; Wilson and Boehland, 2005). The active role of the consumer subject within these consumptive choices needs consideration.

Relevant to the goals of this research, scholarship around these lifestyles highlights the need to explore the motivations for their adoption, as these are fundamental to the actualities of the consumptive intentions. For example, Zavestoski (2002) found that the primary motivation for anti-consumption tendencies is self-actualisation and personal growth, while materialism is associated with negative and unethical qualities such as being self-centred and envious (Bauer et al. 2012; Belk 1985). This aligns with Rose’s (1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000) work on the pursuit of being the optimal version of the ‘self’. Certainly, ethical consumption has been attached to this notion of being self-governed into responsible and ethical consumption choices (Binkley, 2006). Questions of patterns of consumption around the THL are complex, as highlighted by the ever-growing commodification of these often ‘Disneyfied’ homes and the uncertainty around the actualities of these aspects of the THL due to minimal research.

2.7 Conclusion: justifying the approach

This investigation highlighted the lack of scholarship around fundamental aspects of the THL (i.e. financial and legal actualities, motivations for adoption, potential for long-term impacts on housing consumption, spatial impact of patterns of consumption, being ‘outside’ traditional housing and consumer culture). While the THL is intended to provide many positive offerings (low cost, simplification, sustainability, less regulation), empirical exploration of the realities of these provisions and outcomes of dweller experiences is minimal. The novelty of this research approach in utilising quasi-ethnographic neoliberal governmentalities methods to explore agency and resistance through the American dream lens is highlighted through this review. The use of this approach is justified as the THL is intended to provide offerings such as empowerment, resilience, autonomy and self-reliance, while also allowing for the pursuit of an affordable version of homeownership (Schafer, 2010; Mitchell, 2014, 2018; Anson, 2013, 2017). Digging beyond the superficial, an exploration of the intentions, motivations, and experience, rooted in an understanding of underlying governing practices involved in the desire for homeownership and optimising the ‘self’, has the potential to provide clarity around this lifestyle superseding traditional housing for the long-term for some parts of society. Indeed, of particular interest to this research is how the THL relates to tendencies around both the consumption of housing and the enactment of consumption in and around the home, and this approach allows for such considerations. The goal is to investigate (1) to what extent individuals are governed into this housing option; (2) how subjectivities are developed and reconstituted around the THL; (3) how the THL counters, disrupts, or aligns with governing the pursuit of housing; and (4) the impact of this small-living option on patterns of ‘everyday’ consumption. How this will be achieved, while allowing for the reflexive processes of the methodological design to lead, and thus reveal other significant aspects (Charmaz, 2000), is the focus of the next chapter.

3. Methodology: developing an approach to explore the THL

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and justifies the methodological approach used in this thesis, as an appropriate methodology is critical for successful exploration of a research topic. The previous chapter situated the aim, objectives, and RQs of this thesis within an extensive review of the literature, while this chapter looks to position them within an appropriate methodology. The goal of this methodological approach was to investigate the THL and engage with the THL dweller in order to explore the experience of ‘tiny’ living. This chapter is organised as follows: firstly, the methodological context of this project is reviewed to establish and justify the perspective of the research (section 3.2). Following this, the research design, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations are presented, including how the research phases addressed each research question (section 3.3). Finally, the sampling and recruitment strategy is presented (section 3.4). This chapter looks to develop and justify the methodological approach used to review governing practices involved in the development of THL dweller subjectivities.

3.2 Methodological context and justification

This section presents the methodological context and justification, as this provides insight into the perspective from which the design and analysis of this research took place. First, the development of this methodological approach to investigate this alternative housing opportunity is introduced in section 3.2.1. Following from this, the conceptual lens is presented (Foucauldian theory of power) in order to justify using quasi-ethnographic methods to review the ‘micro-physics’ of power in section 3.2.2. This section also explains the understanding of subjectivity and positionality taken by this research. Section 3.2.3 explores the ontological and epistemological (constructivist/interpretivist) understanding, as these define the development of this research plan. Subsequently, the analytical approach (constructivist grounded theory) is reviewed in order to further clarify the methodological point of view of this research (section 3.2.4). Finally, in section 3.2.5 a discussion of qualitative methods is presented, including a review of some strengths and limitations.

3.2.1 Developing a methodological approach to the exploration of an alternative housing opportunity

The development of this methodological approach occurred as a result of investigating scholarship around sustainable housing, affordable housing, and/or the spatiality of home and patterns of consumption. Largely, the focus of these areas of research has been on aspects related to energy performance, resource use, and house size (Wilson and Boehland, 2005), eco-communities and sustainable building (Seyfang, 2009), minimal living (Rodriguez, 2017; Lee and Ahn, 2016; Chatzidakis and Lee 2013; Iyer and Muncy 2009), understanding pro-environmental behaviours (Fielding et al., 2008), and exploring practice enactment specific to consumption (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005). This scholarship relies upon methods designed around environmental psychology rooted in rational choice theory (for example Fransman and van Timmeren, 2017; Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), tracing practices using social practice theory (for example Karvonen, 2013; Halkier et al., 2011; Hand et al., 2005, 2007), and STS approaches to consumption (for example Geels, 2005; Bhaduri and Sharma, 2014; Fang Yang, 2009). This research moves away from these tendencies not in outright critique but in order to align with the recent turn in methodological approaches within neoliberal governmentalities studies (for example Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; Brady and Lippert, 2016; McKee, 2011, 2016). The relevance of this scholarship was identified within a preliminary review of the literature after exploring the significance of the THL arising amidst an affordable housing and economic crisis. This approach ‘investigates the changes wrought by neoliberalism through methodologies that involve combining an analytics of governmentality with ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methods....to avoid deterministic, homogenous, and static accounts of social transformation’ (Brady, 2014, p. 11), whereby non-archival qualitative methods, or ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic, are used to review technologies of governance within a specific time and place (Brady, 2016). This turn does not strictly adhere to traditional ethnographic approaches of participant immersion therefore, the design of this research, using both ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews, appropriately fits within this methodological turn. Most relevantly, this approach has been utilised within housing research that has largely focused on social housing in the UK, specifically Flint, 2002, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011, 2016. This scholarship was relied upon within empirical chapters to further support the methodological direction. A Foucauldian understanding of power, which

further supports this methodological approach, and the subjectivity and positionality taken are presented in section 3.2.2.

3.2.2 A Foucauldian understanding of power, subjectivity, and positionality

This research is examined through the conceptual lens of a Foucauldian theory of power, which supports the reflexive nature of the project as a Foucauldian understanding of power departs from theories of centralised, top-down sovereign forms of power and moves to the understanding of government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 1982, 1991; Dean, 1999). According to Foucault, modern power relations are unique in their relationship to the subject, whereby power is applied to ‘everyday’ (Foucault, 2000). Indeed, the subject is created within these power relations, as the individual comes to understand themselves according to these power/knowledge networks. Utilising this understanding, Alex and Hammarstrom (2008) highlight the need for a methodological review of power relations during the execution of reflexive methods. While their application was specific to the consideration of power within interview dynamics (revisited in relation to the semi-structured interview approach in Section 3.3.2), this insight was applied to the methodological design of this research as a whole. Arguably, this was relevant to designing and executing ethnographic observations, inspired by the recent turn in Foucauldian governmentality research that utilises ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methodologies. Leading with the Foucauldian understanding that power can be productive conceptually aided in reviewing and offering reflexive considerations in the execution of methods. This research design allowed for a review of the ‘everyday’ and micro-level activities and thus provided a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which power relations ‘played out’, supporting the exploration of the researcher’s subjectivity and positionality. Indeed, ‘it is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in the research process’ (Sultana, 2007, p. 380).

Oliver et al. (2005) argue that reflexivity provides a means to reveal the manoeuvrings of power whereby the researcher should reflect on his or her position and the potentialities of influential power relations. Positionality, defined by one’s subjectivity, ‘reflects the position the research decides to adopt within a given research study’ (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p. 71). Therefore, positionality occurs by: (1) reflecting on the researcher’s subjectivity; (2) reflecting on how one relates to the participants and how participants view

them; and (3) reflecting on the research context and process (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). This allows for consideration and acknowledgment of personal predispositions, whereby the individual's views, values, and beliefs are reflected upon. Through the reflexive process, clarity of positionality unfolds. This requires understanding the researcher's cultural, political and social points of view, and understanding the context of the research. This should occur before and during the research process (Bryman, 2012). Of course, the researcher cannot escape being a part of the social world they study therefore these influences need to be understood and acknowledged but cannot be eliminated (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Indeed, one can never describe something objectively (Glaserfield, 1988); rather the researcher must be honest about their positionality in order to inform the reader of these potential influences on interpretation. Reflection on the subjectivity of the researcher, their position within this research, and the potential power dynamics within and throughout data collection allowed for an approach consistent with the epistemological and ontological perspective of this research. A review of these considerations of this research is presented next in section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 Epistemological and ontological understanding

The interrelationship between a researcher's epistemological and ontological views, theoretical stance, methodology and chosen methods needs exploration in order to fully develop the research design (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology refers to the way in which knowledge is acquired or made while ontology describes what constitutes reality (Gray, 2004). Ontology and epistemology are mutually dependent, as a specific epistemological stance implies an ontological perspective, and vice versa (Crotty, 1998). Indeed, within constructivist understandings, the distinction between epistemological and ontological positions disappear as 'the investigator and the object of investigation are interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 204). This understanding is utilised by the development of Charmaz's (2000) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (reviewed below in section 3.2.4), countering conventional grounded theory approaches that rely on more realist distinctions of epistemology and ontology (such as Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The research undertaken for this thesis was rooted in a constructivist/interpretivist ontological and epistemological perspective. Constructivism and interpretivism are closely linked;

according to constructivists, the meanings of objects and actions are constructed by the subject, while interpretivists explore the ‘culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Therefore, both follow the notion that meaning can be interpreted and constructed in different ways even in relation to the same phenomenon (Gray, 2004) as an interpretation is a construction of a reading of meanings (Schwandt, 1998). This position is in contrast to a positivist approach, which argues that an empirically evidenced single objective reality exists for any phenomenon or research question. This research followed the interpretivist approach as displayed in Table 3.1. Thus, this research was undertaken with a relativist understanding that meaning is subjectively and intersubjectively attached to a specific phenomenon and, importantly, the role of the research cannot be divorced from that phenomenon (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Holloway, 1997). This interpretivist/constructivist rooted research exploring the THL in the United States supports the RQs developed through the literature in an investigation of the experiential, socially distinct, demographically varied, contextually specific to time and place. The conceptual lens and methods for this research were chosen using this epistemology in order to stay consistent with the model by which this research views social reality (Silverman, 2006). CGT is reviewed next in section 3.2.4 to further develop and clarify the theoretical position of this research.

Table 3.1 Differences between positivism and interpretivism (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2009, p. 337)

| Assumptions | Positivism | Interpretivism |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Nature of reality | Objective, tangible, single | Socially constructed, multiple |
| Goal of research | Explanation, strong prediction | Understanding, weak prediction |
| Focus of interest | What is general, average, and representative? | What is specific, unique, and deviant? |
| Knowledge generated | Laws absolute (time, context, and value free) | Meanings relative (time, context, culture, value bound) |
| Subject/Researcher relationship | Rigid separation | Interactive, cooperative, participative |
| Desire information | How many people think and do specific thing, or have a specific problem? | What some people think and do, what kind of problems they are confronted with, and how they deal with them |

3.2.4 Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

CGT (Charmaz, 2000) moves beyond the traditional grounded theory approaches which promote ‘no *a priori*’ knowledge of the subject matter before data collection. CGT is developed from a constructivist epistemological and ontological point of view whereby, as Charmaz states, CGT is rooted ‘squarely in the interpretive tradition’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 300). Both CGT and traditional grounded theory use the development of theories based on data findings in an effort to explain empirical phenomena. Sampling, data collection and data analysis are intertwined rather than occurring linearly in order to create a reflexive process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2000). However, traditional grounded theory sees the subjective researcher as problematic to the legitimacy of the research. For instance, a literature review is considered to be a constricting exercise that may impact the process negatively (Ramalho et al., 2015). CGT instead is realistic about the subjective researcher and the potential need for a literature exploration prior to data collection. Indeed, CGT does not see the researcher as an undesirable presence but instead the researcher’s voice as something to include and acknowledge in the research (Ramalho et al., 2015). CGT allows the reflexive process inherent to this approach to prioritise the data over the subjective researcher’s assumptions and prior knowledge. Therefore, CGT does not seek to disregard prior understanding, but to let the data lead. This reflexive process asks the researcher to take into account their assumptions ‘not to suspend subjectivity, but to use the researcher’s interpretive framework consciously as the basis for developing new understandings’ (Levy, 2003, p. 94).

Based on this, the influence of theoretical understandings, socio-cultural perspectives, and governing practices on the research design and the researcher’s subjectivity was acknowledged. However, CGT methods were followed to ensure that the data lead the process. This included the use of theoretical sampling whereby new participants were discovered through the data collection process. Data were transcribed and coded just after being collected, which allowed for code categorisation and understanding to emerge from the data itself. Coding categories were adjusted after new data and new concepts were uncovered. Continual comparison of data allowed the researcher to notice patterns and trends early on and adjust accordingly (Charmaz, 2014). Memo summarisations and interim reports were used by the researcher (all of which are reviewed in section 3.3). An inductive, reflexive approach was necessary for exploration of an alternative housing option such as the THL, one

with very little academic scholarship and many unknowns. To support this approach, the epistemology, ontology, analytical perspective and conceptual lens that led this research design and the viewpoint of the researcher, qualitative methods were utilised and the next section justifies this.

3.2.5 A qualitative approach

Qualitative methods support a flexible and open exploration of a subject matter. Using these methods allowed for an investigation of the social, experiential, and nuanced complexities of power structures specific to the THL. Qualitative methods are different from quantitative methods as ‘...the multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). These methods often enable a more personal relationship between the researcher and participants whereby probing and open-ended questions support an inductive exploration.

The weaknesses of qualitative methods should also be acknowledged, although much of the critique stems from different epistemological and ontological perspectives. Qualitative methods are often criticised for not being contextually sensitive and attempting to make essentialist claims about a phenomenon (Silverman, 2006). The three frequently noted concerns are: ‘reliability’, ‘validity’ and ‘generalisability’ (Silverman, 2006). Some argue that qualitative methods have an issue of ‘reliability’ due to the subjective role of the researcher in field research. The researcher determines the categorisation of described events or activities and for example, although audio recordings are often made and transcribed, some small moments, gestures, mannerisms, etc... can be lost and alter interpretations. The researcher must be diligent in documenting all procedures in various formats (audio, memos, field notes, diary). Additionally, qualitative methods are critiqued for their potential ‘anecdotalism’ whereby critics claim that these methods are only telling the story of a few examples of a phenomenon. This brings to light the ‘validity’ of qualitative claims, although this can be addressed through a diligently planned and executed research approach. Additionally, the researcher must be aware of what sort of claims can be made based on the data collected (Silverman, 2006). For example, the data did not prove ‘facts’ about this alternative housing opportunity but rather constructed accounts of the situational experience of ‘tiny’ living. With the question of ‘generalisability’ of the data findings, this is seemingly a

question of ontology and epistemology. Countering a positivist perspective, the concern within social sciences research lies less with the representativeness of the sampling and more with purposive or theoretical sampling that creates a reflexive process of ‘checks and balances’ (Silverman, 2006).

Ultimately, qualitative research methods validated by a reflexive methodological approach can then inductively provide nuanced insight. This research used constructivist grounded theory (CGT), as developed by Charmaz (2014), to ensure a reflexive process (presented above in section 3.2.4). Additionally, a multi-method approach was used to bring greater validity. The choice of qualitative methods of exploration was indicative of the point of the view of researcher; as reality is subjective and constructed by those involved in the research, the resultant outcomes of this research were co-constructed by both the researcher and participants (Creswell, 1994). Ultimately, this qualitative stance supported the nature of the developed RQs, whereby the goal was to ‘unpack’ the THL experience.

Next, the research process that aided in the attainment of empirical evidence reliant on the above-presented methodological context is explained in section 3.3.

3.3 Research process

This section presents the design of this research, providing a rationale for the approach, data collection and analysis strategies and ethical considerations. The research design consisted of two phases in order to address the RQs. Phase 1 involved attending tiny house community events and observing those occupying tiny houses (with field diary). Phase 1a. refers to ethnographic observations made at tiny house events, specifically the Annual Tiny House Jamboree 2016 in Colorado Spring, CO and a tiny house meetup group in Washington D.C. Phase 1b. refers to ethnographic observations and home tours at the ‘Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community’ (Orlando, FL) and two tiny home sites. Phase 2 included semi-structured interviews with 20 tiny households (24 dwellers), over Skype, phone, and in-person at home sites. Table 3.2 presents the research design to explain the purpose of each method.

Table 3.2 Research design

| Method | Purpose |
|--|--|
| Phase 1a. Ethnographic personal observations at tiny house events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the THL in general • Observe dwellers of tiny houses and those involved in the THL • Identify gatekeepers |
| Phase 1b. Ethnographic personal observations at tiny house one-off sites (home tours) and a tiny house community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe home spaces • Investigate dweller relationship to home space • Observe consumptive aspects • Explore specificities of a tiny home community |
| Phase 2. Semi-structured interviews with tiny house dwellers via Skype, phone, or home visit (*four selling) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore motivations for adopting the THL • Explore the experience of tiny living • Inquire about shifts in patterns of consumption • Explore motivations for selling home (*) |

3.3.1 Phase 1: Ethnographic personal observations with field diary

According to Emerson et al. (2011), ethnography ‘begins with the day-by-day writing up of field notes, observations and reflections concerning the field’ (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 353). Observations using a field diary of those occupying tiny houses and events provided an ethnographic assessment of the THL (Agar, 1980; Emerson et al., 2011). Emerson’s insight on field notes that ‘in recognizing ‘the field’ as construction, one can appreciate the ways in which the implicit assumptions and routine practices that produce it, in turn, shape and constrain the writing of fieldnotes’ (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 354), supports the conceptual lens used by this research that relies upon ethnographic methods to explore nuances of governing practices.

Phase 1a. involved attending tiny house community events and making ethnographic observations, specifically the Annual Tiny House Jamboree 2016 in Colorado Spring, CO and a tiny house meetup group in Washington D.C. Events were also used early on in the research process as a ‘way in’ to the community. The research project was made known and ‘gatekeepers’, or active and connected individuals, were identified at these events.

Phase 1b. involved ethnographic observations made at the ‘Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community’ (Orlando, FL) and one-off tiny home sites. The ‘Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community’ in Orlando, Florida was selected as it is one of the largest tiny house communities in the United States. Additionally, a tiny home was available for

nightly rental for those interested in experiencing small-space living. Therefore, this allowed the researcher to live in the community and be immersed in the small-space living experience and create trust with dwellers. This occurred over a one-week period during which field notes were kept about the personal tiny house living experience. Conversations occurred with the founder of the community (who does not live in a tiny home) and with several dwellers within the community. A daily field diary articulating the many observations and conversations allowed for frequent data collection and reflection, while several photos were taken to complement this diary.

Observations were made at each tiny house event, site visit, and while staying at the tiny house community. Field notes were written contemporaneously with the interactions observed (Emerson et al., 2011). Notetaking followed a two-part, descriptive and reflective, approach. Descriptive information included observations of aesthetics and physical settings, personal sensory responses, actions, decision-making, behaviours, conflicts, collaborations and conversations. Reflective information included feelings, ideas, questions, criticisms and concerns that occurred through the observation process (Schwandt, 2015). Additionally, multi-sensory observations occurred whereby any sound, smell, touch or striking visual aspects were noted and described. Sensory ethnography uses the embodied experience and an attention to the sensory perception as another means of exploration and understanding (Pink, 2011). Ethnographers vary in how they approach field notes, with some emphasising the need for detailed and systematic notetaking and use of qualitative coding techniques, while others feel that placing too much interest in notetaking during the observation process may interfere with the interaction the researcher has with what he or she observes (Emerson et al., 2011). This research approach used a systematic field note-taking strategy, as qualitative coding techniques were used (see section 3.2.4). This, however, did not mean that ‘hands-on’ observations were not made when the opportunity arose. An example of field notes from the Annual Tiny House Jamboree featuring descriptive, reflective, and multi-sensory observations is presented next.

Field diary entry, Annual Tiny House Jamboree written on the 5th of August, 2016

The Tiny House Jamboree, or ‘The Jam’, as known to tiny house aficionados and active members of the community, was held in the field next to the Falcon Stadium at the US Air Force Academy Campus in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. With a breathtaking view of the Rocky Mountains in sight, I wandered the field packed with

builders, vendors, over 50 tiny houses for viewing, local refreshment and food stalls/trucks, a speaker's stage built to resemble a tiny house, live music, and tens of thousands of tiny house enthusiasts. Vendors were selling items one may need to begin building and living in a tiny home: composting toilets, solar panels, wind capture devices, generators, multi-function furniture, hammocks, permaculture tools, and more. Additionally, a film viewing tent was showing two recent documentaries on small and minimalist living at several times throughout the weekend, while a round table question and answer allowed for anyone to receive advice. The energy and excitement of the weekend ahead was engaging. Walking through 'The Jam', however, I did wonder how many of these thousands of people were really interested in adopting this lifestyle and how many were here just to have a fun-filled weekend viewing these cute homes.

After observations were made, photographs were used to capture physical aspects. Photographs act as mnemonic devices, support an interpretation of place, and help frame the site but ultimately photographs are another source of insight; 'Images are better approached not as a photographic record to be reviewed and analysed, but rather as part of my reflexive engagement with the way we construct knowledge about the field' (Emmel and Clark, 2011, p. 1). These photos were used as part of the field diary. Figure 3.1 and 3.2 (below) present the ways in which photos supported field diary notes. For example, these images provided a more nuanced understanding to the above-presented field diary entry, as they show specificities of crowd density, demographics, types of tiny houses, presentation of tiny houses by builders, as well as capturing this distinct time and space. Observations of these captured images supported the reflexive nature of this research and led to new areas of inquiry and empirical insights. Additionally, after each event and site visit, an 'in-process memo' was written freely, exploring any memories, thoughts and/or insights and summarising events (Emerson et al., 2011), while any practical or methodological questions were noted.



Figure 3.1 Tiny builder's model and information (Author's photo)



Figure 3.2 Attendees waiting to view a home (Author's photo)

3.3.2 Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews

Phase 2 undertook semi-structured interviews with 20 tiny households (24 dwellers) over Skype, phone, or in-person at tiny house sites (Patton, 1990; Cohen et al., 2007; Longhurst, 2009, 2010; Secor, 2010; Galletta, 2013). Recruitment of all participants is discussed in section 3.4. Semi-structured interviews are a middle-ground interview approach that allows specified aspects of inquiry to be discussed while also using probes to inspire further elaborations or clarifications. Information exchanges via semi-structured interviews requires a well-structured research plan and well-trained researcher. Communication skills, clear articulation of questions, listening abilities, amiable qualities to encourage interview comfort and openness, and the ability to appropriately probe are all crucial elements of a successful semi-structured interview data collection process (Cohen et al., 2007).

While semi-structured interviews are immensely useful to provide a platform for dialogue between researcher and participants, some major weaknesses of this process should be noted and addressed. Positionality and reflexivity debates have emerged in recent years around qualitative research methods (Salzman, 2002). This has highlighted the need for researchers to take account of their own position and how it influences the research process, especially with respect to education, gender, class, race, culture and others. However, as argued above, there is a view that the subjective position of the researcher is useful when incorporated with a reflexive approach whereby a continual review of the influence of the researcher (reflexivity) is incorporated into the research approach (Rose, 1997). In conducting

interviews, this process of positionality contemplation and the use of a reflexive approach, as was done by this research, are important to provide awareness and continued review of the constructs at play. Clearly, the success of this process depends on the skills of the researcher therefore online training sessions on conducting semi-structured interviews were used in order to prepare for these interactions and to gain communication and probing skills.

An interview schedule was developed that included a list of questions and inquiry topics that were covered in the interview (Patton, 1990). The interview schedule was organised thematically to provide organisation and flow. Interview inquiry questions were designed to draw out aspects specific to motivations for adoption, experience of tiny living, patterns of consumption, and motivations for trying sell (relevant to four dwellers). The researcher followed the guide but also had the freedom to explore alternative topics that arose through the probing process. This semi-structured style allowed both researcher and participant to shape the interview, thus removing, to some extent, the power relationships that can be detrimental to truth-building and ultimately information exchange. This allowed for the ‘story’ of each tiny house dweller’s experience to unfold fluidly. There was consistency in a majority of questions asked, however the semi-structure allowed for variation in order and wording. These general points of inquiry were followed:

1. Motivation for tiny house living
 - a. Tell me about your motivations for going ‘tiny’.
 - b. Tell me about how you came to live in this tiny home.
2. Tiny living experience
 - a. Tell me about your experience of living in the tiny home.
 - b. Tell me about what you most enjoy and least enjoy about living in a tiny home.
 - c. Is it different than what you expected? How is it different from your former housing?
 - d. Tell me about any sacrifices you have had to make moving from your previous home. Regrets?
 - e. Do you think what you need from your home has changed? If so, how?
3. Consumption in the tiny home
 - a. In general, have daily patterns or habits in the home changed since shifting to tiny house living? For example, do you grocery shop more often? drive more? store materials differently? spend more time outside? buy less clothing?
 - b. What ‘things’ (material/technologies), if any, have proven most useful in living in a tiny home? Appliances? Storage mechanisms?
 - c. What skill(s), if any, have you gained from living in a tiny home? Home maintenance skills? New cooking techniques? Organization?
4. Tell me about your reasons for trying to sell the home *those trying to sell

Answers were recorded using a digital Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim and coded. Codes were categorised and linked according to predefined themes based on the literature review, while the reflexive process of CGT allowed new themes to unfold.

In order to gain insight around both relationships to traditional housing and how patterns of consumption have shifted since adopting the THL, tiny house dwellers that formerly lived in traditional housing (as homeowners or renters) in the US were of interest to this research. Participants were asked to recall how experiences and patterns of consumption around the home have shifted since transitioning from a traditional housing situation to the THL. Notably, this assisted in understanding the ways in which spatial constraints impact patterns of consumption. Additionally, the accuracy of recall was addressed due to the retrospective nature of this inquiry. The reliability of recalling retrospective events is often questioned within research methods (de Vaus, 2006). The fact that participants were asked to recall facts before and after a significant life event (moving into a tiny home) created a clear divide to support the recall process. This was further managed through inquiring about specificities, as well as allowing for an open-ended recall. Essentially, questions were asked in order to reveal shifts at the micro-level (e.g. 'Has the frequency of cooking changed? If so, how?', 'Has the frequency of grocery shopping changed? If so, how?'). While broader questions were also asked, such as, 'has what you need from a home changed? 'what do you most and least enjoy?'. Finally, dwellers were asked to submit photos of their homes when an in-person interview was not possible.

3.3.3 Fieldwork challenges

While fieldwork offers the opportunity 'to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 16), it is necessary to expect the unexpected as it is dependent on the people encountered and the potential shifting circumstances and allowances. While fieldwork was entered with an outlined plan, the possibility of challenges and limitations that could alter this developed plan was acknowledged. While, in general, tiny house dwellers were eager to share their experience, there were instances of refusal or dismissal. There were also dwellers who committed to participate with an established time and date, yet were unable to be contacted as the date approached. Additionally, some participants expressed concern with the way in which this research would portray the THL. Furthermore, several dwellers expressed

reluctance in providing a home tour, yet were willing to participate in an interview via Skype or phone. Indeed, this highlighted the way many value the opportunity that the THL offers to ‘fly under the radar’. Two dwellers were unwilling to provide their location as they were parked illegally. Due to this challenge, the number of home tours was less than originally planned. Notably, there was no difference identified in the willingness to share or not to share information whether the interview was conducted in-person, via Skype, or by phone.

Furthermore, as this research was looking to explore the THL across the United States, geographical challenges did arise. The researcher was based in Washington D.C. and was only able to travel to the Northeast and mid-Atlantic region for site visits. This limited the opportunity for home tours, as some participants were willing but the location was too far. However, as reviewed above, in order not to limit the research in this way, ethnographic research was conducted in Orlando, Florida at Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community (Southeast United States) and in Colorado Springs, Colorado at the Annual Tiny House Jamboree 2016 (Western United States). Using Skype and phone interviews enabled participation from dwellers across the United States. Finally, challenges in recruiting participants at the Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community did arise, as initially dwellers were sceptical of the researcher’s intentions. It became clear that this reluctance was due to the bombardment this community received from visitors who view these houses as cute, Disneyfied sites to tour, rather than personal homes. Additionally, the weeklong stay at the community allowed for relationships to be established with community-members and the owner. This occurred simply through being visible within the community by taking frequent walks and initiating non-confrontational interactions.

3.3.4 Positionality

It is necessary to provide the reader with a reflection on the positionality of the researcher. The process of being reflexive aided in clarifying this position and the way in which the researcher related to the research process. Indeed, as explained in section 3.2.3., reflecting on the power relations at play, the researcher’s subjective role and position taken, and production of knowledge, are critical (Sultana, 2007). Notably, CGT does not see the researcher as an undesirable presence but instead the researcher’s voice as something to include and acknowledge through a reflexive process, while fundamentally letting the data lead (Ramalho et al., 2015). The researcher cannot fully disconnect from their socio-cultural

histories or experiences. The point of view of the researcher is that of a Caucasian, middle-class, educated female. This was considered throughout the fieldwork process, including in the ways in which ethnographic observations, interview procedures and execution of questioning/prompting were approached.

The position of the researcher carried a predisposed cultural and social awareness, as the researcher grew up in the United States, something which was considered when approaching fieldwork. At the same time, the United States is an expansive country with various socio-cultural histories. However, regional and state-to-state understandings are embedded in the culture. While the fieldwork locations were not familiar to the researcher prior to embarking on the project, understandings of these specific geographic areas did exist. For example, Orlando, Florida, was understood by the researcher to be a place of excessive consumerism, chain restaurants and theme parks, and Colorado Springs as a politically conservative region of Colorado. After reflecting on this understanding, an attempt was made to acknowledge these inclinations when making ethnographic personal observations and conducting interviews in these regions.

Additionally, the researcher had no direct experience with tiny house living or any other alternative forms of housing prior to this research but had been exposed to ‘tiny’ living media through the documentary *Tiny* and news articles on the lifestyle prior to developing this research. Therefore, the researcher had formed understanding of and interest in the THL as an aesthetically appealing housing alternative that seemingly offered a more sustainable way to live. After reflecting on this perspective, a clear effort was made to remove this predisposed understanding of what the THL offered and represented. Admittedly, the researcher has a personal interest in living and promoting more sustainable livelihoods; however, an attempt was made to remove any previously developed opinion of this lifestyle when approaching fieldwork.

Furthermore, the researcher’s childhood was spent within traditional homeownership, while her adult life consisted of participating in the traditional rental market in several cities both in the US and the UK, as a result of which she had experience of the unaffordability of the rental market in many cities, specifically Washington D.C., Boston and London. The researcher is a similar age and has a similar housing history to many of the participants.

While the housing histories and financial concerns many of these participants were facing were relatable to the researcher, caution was taken not to influence accounts due to personal experiences of housing. Simultaneously, the researcher's familiarity with this situation aided in a direct understanding of dweller expressions and allowed for follow-up prompts incited from first-hand knowledge. Indeed, the interactions with participants suggested that many identified a relatability in the researcher, perhaps due to similarities in age or educational or socio-cultural background. This seemingly led to an ease within ethnographic and interview interactions.

The common distinction made within positionality explorations between being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' is relevant to this research (Weiner-Levy and Queder, 2012; Merton, 1972). The strength of approaching research from both sides has been reviewed extensively (for example Merton, 1972; Kusow, 2003; Hammersley, 1993; Mercer, 2007). Of course, the position of the researcher does not exist in this dichotomous manner. As Mercer (2007) argues, these exist in a continuum whereby researchers move back and forth as the position is always in flux, shifting with context and situation. Arguably the position of this researcher sat more within the 'insider' role as demographic and socio-cultural overlap was more common than not. At the same time, an 'outsider' position was taken in that there was no familiarity with the actualities of tiny house living. Ultimately, as is the methodological design of this research, the goal was to obtain knowledge of dweller experiences living in this manner with minimal predisposed influence on research execution or interpretation. Therefore, a continuous self-reflexive process throughout fieldwork was adopted to ensure these considerations were reviewed frequently. However, it is important to acknowledge that this cannot be eliminated entirely and the subjective perspective is important to the methodological approach of this research rooted in CGT (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Ramalho et al., 2015).

3.3.5 Data collection and analysis

As discussed in the CGT section, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in order to reflexively explore the data. There is a significant 'time cost' for qualitative research due to the time-consuming nature of writing field notes and transcription of interviews (Miles, 1979). Due to this, a rigorous work strategy was adopted. During any down moments between site or event visits, interviews were transcribed, summarisations (in-process memos)

were written and data were coded. In order to maintain the integrity of the CGT approach and allowance of theoretical sampling through data revelations, it was crucial not to fall behind. To address this labour-intensive process, three strategies were used: data reduction using 'in-process memos' to summarise each field contact (Emerson et al., 2011), a systematic and themed diary notetaking tactic exploring both descriptive and reflective observations, and the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package by NVivo was used for analysis of data. NVivo allowed for timesaving and ease of management and coding of data, as well as flexibility with data configurations and adjustments. Using an 'in-process' memo strategy allowed for an immediate reflection on themes and any issues (Emerson et al., 2011), while a systematic field diary strategy allowed for organisation, consistency, and clarity (see Section 3.3.1).

Limitations of these three strategies are acknowledged. The subjective role of the ethnographer was addressed through the use of the CGT process, as well as the use of a multi-method and well-structured research design. Addressing the limitations of NVivo: firstly, computers are no substitute for human understanding and interpretation of the data and some argue they can influence the researcher in a certain direction (Seidel, 1991) and distance the researcher from the data (Barry, 1998). Additionally, the categorisation and coding schemas ultimately steer the software analysis therefore these must be well developed by the researcher (Gibbs, 2002). NVivo is simply a tool to support data analysis and should not be used or empowered to a greater degree. All field notes (diary), memos and semi-structured interviews were entered into NVivo in order to electronically manage the data. A comparison of the *a priori* and emergent themes occurred with each data input. Data were transcribed and entered into NVivo within a few days of each site or event visit.

As transcription is seen as part of analysis (Elliot and Timulak, 2005), each interview was listened to twice to ensure accuracy of transcription and to gain a deeper relationship to the nuances of each account, thus, creating a reflexive and iterative transcription process. This also allowed for a review of moments of interruption in multi-person households, as this occurred with some frequency. Transcriptions occurred verbatim, with no attempts at changing speech patterns or inserting grammatical correctness or punctuation. Interviews ranged in time from 30 mins to 120 minutes. Ultimately, the transcription of interviews allowed for presentation of quotes within empirical chapters, thus providing the reader with

the opportunity to subjectively interpret data. Additionally, each interview recording was again listened to when writing each empirical chapter. As the structure of this PhD divided RQs per empirical chapter, this allowed for each RQ to be singularly considered with each review of recordings and transcriptions, while the initial two instances allowed for a general understanding of dweller accounts and identification of overarching themes, thus steering the structure and theoretical stances of each empirical chapter.

After transcription, interviews were coded for common themes, repeated phrasing, and frequency in responses with each RQ in mind, while the opportunity for overlap or general applicability was considered. Firstly, coding occurred in terms of motivations for adoption of the THL (RQ1 and RQ2) in response to the prompt:

- (1) Tell me about your motivations for going 'tiny'.
- (2) Tell me about how you came to live in this tiny home.

Next, coding took place to explore the experience of 'tiny' living and development of identities (RQ3) around responses to the following prompts/questions:

- (1) Tell me about your experience of living in the tiny home.
- (2) Tell me about what you most enjoy and least enjoy about living in a tiny home.
- (3) Is it different than what you expected?
- (4) How is it different from your former housing?
- (5) Tell me about any sacrifices you have had to make moving from your previous home. Regrets?
- (6) Do you think what you need from your home has changed? If so, how?

Coding around motivations for selling the home and any distinct responses around these dweller accounts took place to contribute to understandings of the experience of tiny living. This occurred through a targeted review of dwellers attempting to sell their homes and their responses to:

- (1) Tell me about your reasons for trying to sell the home?

Finally, themes relevant to consumptive aspects of this lifestyle (RQ4), specifically in terms of shifts in consumption with small-space living, were coded. These were identified through response to:

- (1) 'In general, have daily patterns or habits in the home changed since shifting to tiny house living? For example, do you grocery shop more often? drive more? store materials differently? spend more time outside? buy less clothing?'

(2) ‘What ‘things’ (material/technologies), if any, have proven most useful in living in a tiny home? Appliances? Storage mechanisms?’

(3) ‘What skill(s), if any, have you gained from living in a tiny home? Home maintenance skills? New cooking techniques? Organization?’

Coding in NVivo allowed for themes to be cross-checked both across interviews and with ethnographic observations in field diary entries, linking data from ‘Phase 1: Ethnographic personal observations with field diary’ and ‘Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews’. The coding process occurred both inductively and in an exploratory manner, based on the initial literature review and structured around the RQs.

3.3.6 Ethics

Ethical consideration was undertaken across all phases of research. Ethical approval was sought and awarded by the University of St Andrews Ethical Committee before recruitment began. Semi-structured interviews and personal observations took place at tiny house sites and via phone or Skype. Specific ethical confidentiality issues relevant to the use of Skype were dealt with appropriately. An information sheet/email about the study was given to each participant explaining procedures and research intent. All participants were consenting adults age 18+. Participants were not pressured to divulge any information that they did not wish to. All interviews were recorded and all participants prior to the interview process signed consent forms. All participants were offered copies of their interview transcripts. If requested, the interview could have been stopped at any time. This did not occur. A risk assessment was completed prior to the fieldwork being undertaken.

3.4 Sampling strategy

3.4.1 Site and participant selection

The selection of the research participants, events, and the tiny house community occurred purposively. Purposive sampling allowed for a deliberate and intentional selection of participant perspectives that are engaged in the lifestyle and/or have directly experienced living in a tiny house (Patton, 1990; Charmaz, 2000; Palys, 2008). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that allows the researcher to select participants deemed to have important insight around the research area. Therefore, the Annual Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado Springs, CO was selected as the first event to attend as it offered the largest gathering of tiny house enthusiasts in the United States. It also offered a considerable

potential as an event to identify and connect with ‘gatekeepers.’ The event took place across a three-day period, 5th – 7th of August 2016, with an attendance of approximately 75,000 individuals. The inaugural year of this event was 2015 in which 40,000 people were in attendance. This event was made known to the researcher via a Facebook post through a tiny house community page. The ‘big names’ of the THL were advertised to be speaking, individuals the researcher had identified to be prominent voices in the THL through a review of literature and online sources (tiny house community forums, websites, and Facebook pages). Specifically, Jay Shafer (the ‘founder’ of the THL, appeared on The Oprah Winfrey show), Zack Giffin (host of Tiny House Nation TV show), Deek Diedricksen (THL YouTube host), Jewel Pearson (a popular THL personality after appearing on Tiny House, Big Living TV show), and Macy Miller (an early adopter whose story appeared in the Huffington Post and Daily Mail), were all speaking at the Jamboree.

The Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community (Orlando, FL) was selected through the literature review due to the fact that it was a well-established community (over two years running) with several tiny homes and dwellers. As tiny house community living in this form is a new phenomenon in the US, it was revealed after in-depth inquiry that very few well-established communities actually exist, though several communities were being planned and built at the time. The Orlando Lakefront: A Tiny Home and RV Community (Orlando, FL) welcomes both RVs and tiny houses. There are currently 13 tiny houses on site, 11 on wheels and two on foundations. The community is situated on a lake and includes water, sewers and rubbish collection, as well as use of boats and fishing docks. The community includes DIY tiny houses brought in, as well as custom-designed homes provided by the community. Solar energy is encouraged; however, due to zoning laws and proximity to the water table, composting toilets are not allowed. All are welcome, and places are currently available. Additionally, the community uses one tiny home as a bed and breakfast advertised on the Airbnb website to allow people to have a tiny house experience before making a long-term commitment. One-off house visits were achieved through making contact with potential participants and inquiring about their willingness for an in-person interview (recruitment types are presented below in Section 3.4.2). Due to the fact that the researcher was based in Washington D.C. during the fieldwork phase, the geographical focus of in-person interviews remained in the Northeast United States. Those willing to do in-person interviews at one-off sites were located in Staten Island, New York and Brookline, New Hampshire.

Participation for semi-structured interviews was sought from adult individuals (18+) who had lived in a tiny house for approximately one year or more and previously lived in a traditional housing situation (ownership or rental). Ultimately, participant length of residence ranged from seven months to seven years (see Table 3.3).

3.4.2 Recruitment

As the researcher was aware of the challenges around participant recruitment, planning took place in order to address these potential barriers as much as possible. Initially, the ‘gatekeeper’ strategy was used to form relationships and trust with a few active and connected individuals in the THL. Identification of these ‘gatekeepers’ largely occurred through attending the Annual Tiny House Jamboree (August 2016). Contact with identified prominent figures was made via email thereafter. Furthermore, dwellers were recruited utilising the online ‘TinyHouseMap’ database located on tinyhomebuilders.com (as shown in Figure 3.3). This map is an online, interactive database whereby dwellers voluntarily enter their information and location. Contact was made with all dwellers that provided email or phone information on this database and who lived in one-off tiny houses (using the version located on the website in late spring 2016). Snowballing, or remaining flexible and allowing for development of any contacts throughout the process, occurred by asking participants whether they knew of others who may have insight or experience applicable to the research. A few contacts were made by snowballing, either through relationships formed at events, the community, or one-off dwellers. The risk of homogeneity across participant accounts due to the voluntary nature of this online database and/or the contact made with prominent figures in THL was acknowledged. Therefore, the decision was made to contact those trying to sell their tiny houses using an online website entitled tinyhouselistings.com. All listings on the site in January and February 2017 were contacted.

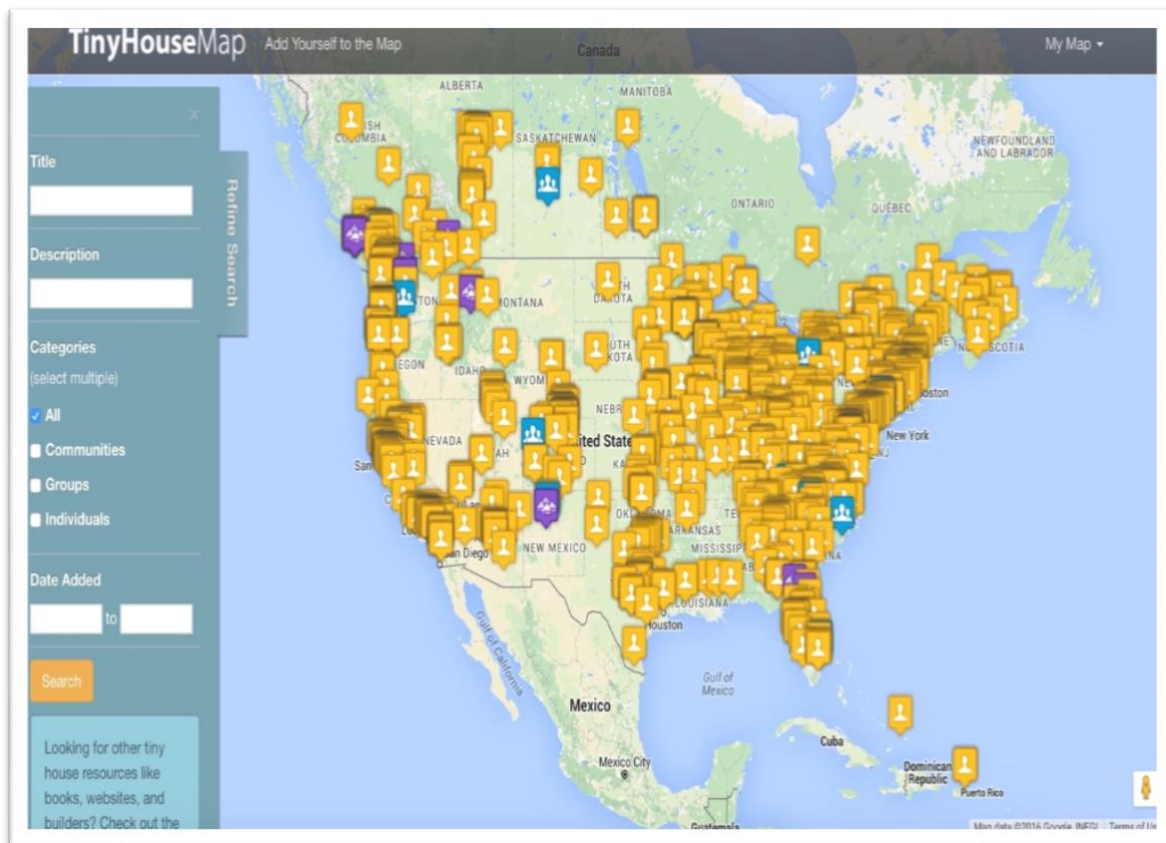


Figure 3.3 TinyHouseMap online database

This recruitment process resulted in semi-structured interviews with 20 tiny households, while 24 individual dwellers were included in these interviews. Four were attempting to sell their homes, while none of those trying to sell had yet done so. Niko (late 20s, male), who lived in the home with his girlfriend (late 20s), moved out of the home due to legal issues. Ben (mid 30s, male), who still owns his home and is not trying to sell, moved out due to discontentment with not being able to park the home in an urban area. Participant information, using pseudonyms, is presented in Table 3.3. Interviews took place between September 2016 and April 2017.

Table 3.3 Participant information

| Interview participant(s) (age, gender) | House cost (USD) (history of build) | House Size | Length of residence | House financing |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Elizabeth (mid 30s, female) | 30,000 (self- designed) | 18 m ² / 192 ft ² | 1 year | 5 year loan, 3.9% interest, will be paid in 4 years |
| Debbie (early 50s, female) - lives with daughter (age 17) | 134,000 (accessory dwelling on a foundation built in the 1970s) | 37 m ² / 400 ft ² | 5 years | Cash from sale of former house |
| Cameron (early 40s, male) | Declined to share (used home bought on Craigslist) | 19 m ² / 160 ft ² | 10 months | Paid outright with savings |
| Tessa (late 30s, female) | 65,000 (DIY build) | 23 m ² / 250 ft ² | 1 year | Paid outright with savings |
| Kristin (mid 40s, female) – lives with daughter (age 16) | 35,000 (partial DIY build) | 24 m ² / 255 ft ² | 9 months | Cash from sale of former house |
| Bill (early 60s, male) | 35,000 (DIY build) | 16 m ² / 170 ft ² | 1.5 years | Paid outright with savings |
| Jackie (early 50s, female) | 75,000 (self-designed) | 31 m ² / 330 ft ² | 1.5 years | Paid outright with savings |
| Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male) | 35,000 (DIY build) | 35 m ² / 378 ft ² | 10 months | Paid outright with savings |
| George (mid 60s, male) | 35,000 (DIY build) | 21 m ² / 224 ft ² | 2 years | Paid outright with savings |
| Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male) | 20,000 (2011 home bought on Craigslist) | 16 m ² / 170 ft ² | 1.5 years | Paid outright with savings - land and house |
| Susan (mid 60s, female) – lives with husband (60s) | 145,000 (self-designed) | 24 m ² / 255 ft ² | 7 years | Paid outright with savings |
| Pete (early 30s, male) – lives with girlfriend (age 29) | 25,000 (DIY build) | 15 m ² / 160 ft ² | 2 years | Paid with savings and credit cards |
| Will and Jo (mid 30s, male and female) | 30,000 (self-designed) | 27 m ² / 287 ft ² | 1.5 years | Paid with savings and peer-to-peer loan |
| Cara (mid 20s, female) | 80,000 (self-designed) | 16 m ² / 170 ft ² | 14 months | Used college fund and 2 year loan |
| Joel (late 20s, male) | 25,000 (DIY build) | 18.5 m ² / 200 ft ² | 1 year | Paid outright with savings |
| Niko (late 20s, male) – lives with wife (late 20s) | 50,000 (self-design) | 24 m ² / 260 ft ² | 1 year | 5 year personal loan |
| Joshua (mid 30s, male) – lives with partner (30s) and son (age 2) | 15,000 (DIY build) | 21 m ² /230 ft ² plus 2 lofts | 9 months | Paid with credit cards |
| Oscar, (mid 20s, male) | 8,800 (DIY build) | 19 m ² / 160 ft ² | 7 months | Paid outright with help from grandparents |
| Alice (late 20s, female) | 78,000 (self-designed Tumble weed model) | 20 m ² / 220 ft ² | 2 years | 15 year RV loan |
| Ben (mid 30s, male) | 40,000 (DIY build) | 20 m ² / 210 ft ² | Lived 1.5 years – owns but no longer lives in home | Paid outright with savings and help from family |

Due to the lack of empirical review of the THL, this sample provides insight into the types of people adopting this lifestyle and the various ways in which individuals are choosing to live 'tiny'. The sampling strategy resulted in participants with a range of ages (from mid 20s to 60s), incomes and occupations (varied career types, from student to investment banker, two retired) and family types (11 singles, six couples, two single parents with children, and one couple with a child). Nine households were former traditional homeowners, while the remainder had lived within the traditional rental market. This set of participants allowed for a review of individuals with varied relationships to the housing market and debt, as well as various financial situations and perspectives on life position due to the expansive age range and different family type, thus providing an informative data set for this empirical review of the THL. Four of the households interviewed included two people (three couples, one mother and daughter) that previously lived together in traditional housing in order to get insight from multiple perspectives within the same household. Notably, 19 of the 24 participants were white, while one was African-American. Furthermore, there was variability of tiny house types (foundation and wheels), sizes (from 16 m² to 37 m²), costs (USD 8,800 to 134,000), history of build (DIY, self-design, bought used) and financing (cash, full loan, partial loan). Nine were outright DIY builds, one was partially DIY, seven were self-designed, two were bought on Craigslist, and one was a converted accessory unit on a foundation built in the 1970s. As is the nature of this research type, this set of tiny householders cannot be considered representative of the THL dweller population. However, variability of many aspects of participant demographics and tiny house types may provide a unique opportunity to review the THL, thus aiding in the investigation of dweller subjectivities taken by this research, while also establishing some understanding to contribute to the existent minimal scholarly investigation.

3.5 Methodological reflections

As presented, the methodology of this research was thoroughly planned and executed. However, it is important to acknowledge and reflect upon some elements that could have been done differently in retrospect. It is uncertain as to whether any changes would have affected the outcome of this thesis. This section presents reflections on recruitment and conducting interviews over phone and Skype.

Initial recruitment of participants for this research occurred from attendance of events and the use of a voluntary online database. After reflecting on transcriptions and thematic implications, it became clear that the research would benefit from recruiting dwellers in a different way as there was a great deal of homogeneity in dweller accounts (i.e. high praise and overall positive experiences). This led to the recruitment of dwellers trying to sell their homes via a website specifically for people selling tiny houses. An exposure of the participant homogeneity occurred through a reflexive review of the data rather than a subjective understanding and consideration by the researcher. Perhaps the voluntary nature of the online database and the recruitment of enthusiastic participants from events should have been reflected upon by the researcher earlier in the research process. The researcher acknowledges that the data may have led the results in a different way had this reflection and adjustment occurred earlier, as conducting interviews of selling and non-selling dwellers alongside one another, relying on a CGT approach that intertwines data collection and analysis, may have developed thematic understandings differently. For example, interviews with selling dwellers revealed a deeper understanding of the impact of legal allowances on the ability to live in the home (this was the most common reason for attempting to sell). While legal issues were discussed with non-selling dwellers, the researcher gained deeper insight that may have been useful in trying to uncover the potential for driving others to sell their homes in the future. It is unclear whether this understanding would have changed the outcome of this thesis. Generally, the identification of the need to shift recruitment proved a success of this CGT research approach, whereby the comparison of data throughout the collection process resulted in the identification of patterns and trends, leading to the consideration of the position of these participants and a shift in strategy. This suggests the success of the reflexive process whereby sampling, data collection and data analysis are intertwined rather than occurring linearly (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2000).

Reflections on conducting interviews via phone and Skype also highlighted some areas that may have benefited from further consideration. Deakin and Wakefield (2013) argue that the online interview should not be viewed as a secondary and less ideal choice. However, some issues with online and phone interviews should be acknowledged, such as potential problems building rapport with participants (O'Connor et al., 2008), lack of non-verbal cues for participant and researcher (visible on Skype though perhaps not to the same extent) and issues using or obtaining the technology/Internet (Hay-Gibson, 2009). The interviewer was

aware of and tried to continuously reflect upon these specifics of phone and Skype interviews. For example, extra care was made to build rapport for phone and Skype interviews by having an informal, friendly chat before the interview questions began to ease tension or uncertainty. However, this research may have benefited from developing more of a rapport prior to the scheduled interview, as online and phone interviews have been linked to absentee participants (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). Indeed, several individuals pledged to participate in this research with an established date and time but did not show up for the interview and were inaccessible thereafter. This is found to occur more frequently with online and phone interviews as there is less guilt involved in not showing up for an unfamiliar researcher (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). Once this pattern was noted, care was taken to develop a relationship over email with each participant, using personal questions and anecdotes to establish familiarity and thus more accountability.

Another issue arose with phone and Skype interviews whereby several participants conducted interviews at work, in the car, and one dweller at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Two interviews were cut short and picked up at a later date due to external distraction, despite the scheduling of the interview with a previously discussed timeframe. Indeed, disruptions or distractions can affect interviewee concentration and the flow of the interview (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). Therefore, this research would have benefited from ensuring all interviews, whether via Skype or phone, took place at the home, free from controllable distraction, in order to minimise the effect on data gathering. Furthermore, home interviews could give richer insight as to how participants lived in their homes. Simultaneously, while often face-to-face interviews are viewed as the best practice for conducting interviews (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006), there are benefits of online and/or phone interviews. This includes the ability to overcome geographical distance, reducing expenses and travel time, and widening access to participants. This research benefited immensely from the use of online and phone interviews, allowing for contact with more dwellers over a more expansive geographical region.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological context, approach, design, execution and analysis taken by this research. First, the methodological context was presented and justified, as this provided the backbone on which the research methods were developed. Based on an

extensive literature review, it was determined that an exploration of the THL was best positioned within the recent methodological turn in governmentalities studies as this lifestyle arose amidst an affordable housing and economic crisis, offering an alternative housing option to traditional homeownership and/or the rental market. Additionally, as this lifestyle has received very little academic attention and remains a small but ever-growing housing option, an investigation of the ‘everyday’ nuances was deemed more insightful. Therefore, the design of this research approach, using quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) methods, sought to reflect ‘upon the particular geographic and temporal contexts within which practices or technologies of government unfold’ (Brady, 2016, p. 3). The methods by which this was achieved, including personal ethnographic observations at events and home sites, as well as semi-structured interviews with dwellers, were presented. In the following chapters, the evidence obtained is empirically explored in order to theoretically situate these observations and accounts specific to the THL. The goal is to review the onset and experience of the THL, as well as exposing potentialities of sustainability and impact of consumption.

4. The American dream ethos: freedom and self-determination in the THL

4.1 Introduction

This chapter relies upon Rose's (1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000) work on genealogy of subjectivity and his development of 'ethopower/ethopolitics', which argues that advanced liberal democracies 'work through values, beliefs, and sentiments thought to underpin technologies of responsible self-government and the management of one's obligation to others' (Rose, 2000, p. 1399). Inspired by Foucault's (1988) notion of 'technologies of the self', this approach allows for a review of the ways in which individuals are 'governed from a distance' and under the guise of 'freedom' into being responsible, autonomous and self-reliant subjects (Miller and Rose, 2008). Indeed, most participants expressed the notion of freedom, being free from and free to, and/or aspects related to self-determination (i.e. control and free choice over one's acts) when asked about motivation for adopting tiny living and their experience of tiny living. Therefore, an empirical review of dweller accounts was undertaken in order to explore the governing practices involved in the constitution of these dwellers and to address RQ1: '*Why do dwellers adopt the Tiny Home Lifestyle (THL)?*' and 1a. '*To what extent do dwellers choose the THL?*'. The goal was to understand how these individuals came to this alternative form of housing that gained popularity amidst economic uncertainty and an affordable housing crisis and how freedom and self-determination came to be the primary motivator for the adoption of the THL. The intent is to situate the THL in the larger context allowing for an exploration of the ways in which this current neoliberal era has impacted the pursuit of housing, while the American dream is relied upon as the lens through which to review dweller accounts.

This chapter is structured as follows. In section 4.2, empirical data are first reviewed through the lens of the American dream ethos and normalisation of homeownership. Following this, in section 4.3, the primary motivation of financial freedom is reviewed through the development of two types of THL dwellers. These types are also used in subsequent empirical chapters because they act as a mechanism to understand the ways in which participants relate to the traditional housing market. Moving on, in section 4.4, the expressed benefits of the THL, identified as freedoms by dwellers, are investigated. In section 4.5, the extent to which dwellers have been governed into adopting this lifestyle is explored, before concluding the chapter in section 4.6.

4.2 The ‘tiny’ American dream

Self-governance practices that have supported the pursuit of owning a home are investigated within this section, relying on Flint and Rowlands (2003), McKee (2011 a/b), and McKee et al. (2017) as precedent. Firstly, participants’ explanations of their THLs are compared to aspirations of homeownership and to the American dream ethos. Then the ways in which the normalisation of homeownership has influenced the dweller is explored.

4.2.1 Adapting ‘tiny’ aspirations

The goal of neoliberal governance is to create ‘aspirational citizens’ who take ownership over their perceived failures, thus removing the burden from the state (Raco, 2009, 2011). This is highlighted by dweller accounts that emphasise the pursuit of the aspirational, contemporary American dream. Many dwellers expressed an initial reluctance to leave traditional housing and were concerned about others judging them for adopting the THL. For instance, Debbie (early 50s, female), who is widowed and lives with her teenage daughter, stated that she regrets not doing something like this sooner, noting that she was afraid to sell her traditional house out of fear of appearing ‘unstable’. Several dwellers also indicated that it was a challenge to ‘break away’ from a corporate lifestyle and income. Cameron (early 40s, male) explained that it took him 18 years to leave corporate work despite being unhappy and exhausted. He stated that working long hours in an office was burdensome and unfulfilling and openly questioned why it took him so long to leave a situation so unsatisfying. Additionally, George (mid 60s, male) noted the loss of several relationships in the decision to distance himself from his former life as an investment banker, including having a very large home and excessive material accumulation and spending. He explained that the adoption of the THL was viewed as abnormal and that he was judged by his former friends who maintain a life of material wealth, highlighting the embeddedness of the pursuit of the contemporary version of the American dream, which is one of material accumulation, because abandoning this lifestyle alienated his peers. Elizabeth (mid 30s, female), a professor of architecture, conveyed that ‘I [least enjoy] having to justify myself...mostly to outside acquaintances’ and Debbie (early 50s, female), a nurse who lives in the home with her teen daughter, least enjoyed the ‘negativity from others’, noting that ‘when you tell people, they are like, ‘what? you can’t afford anything else?’’. These accounts emphasise the judgment and stigma associated with living non-traditionally in this way. The reluctance to leave traditional systems for fear of appearing ‘unstable’ and the resultant judgment from this decision supports notions of the entrapping way in which the

American dream ethos is used to suggest optimal ways of being (Harvey, 2005, 2012; Cullen, 2003). Fundamentally, empirical evidence suggested that dwellers were and continue to be concerned with being judged as ‘dependent’, ‘problematic’, or ‘flawed’ members of society, as is the stronghold of modern governance strategies that instil the desire to be viewed as a responsible and ethical citizen (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Raco, 2009). However, dwellers adapted their aspirations away from the traditional American dream towards the THL dream in order to justify the need to house themselves in this way. Indeed, dwellers did act against these social norms in order to pursue a form of housing they deemed more stable.

4.2.2 The ‘tiny’ tenure of choice

Under governing practices that promote self-governance and responsibility, individuals are driven to pursue the optimal version of the ‘self’ and thus homeownership (McKee et al., 2017). As Foucault (1982) argues, normalising judgment tactics allow for a norm to be established in order to measure, divide, and rank individuals according to their distance from this norm. This section reviews how participants articulated taking responsibility over their housing in a period when traditional housing is inaccessible to many of them, termed a ‘fallacy of choice’ by a cohort of young people in the UK (McKee et al., 2017, p. 318). The meritocracy myth is an example of this fallacy of choice because this notion suggests that with hard work and innovation, one can realise the dream of prosperity and material accumulation. Indeed, many dwellers saw renting as an inferior and financially irresponsible option, a ‘flawed’ way to consume housing (Flint, 2003; McKee et al., 2017) and as a notion promoted by neoliberal discourses that divide and subjectify individuals as investors and owners (Gurney, 1999; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; Ronald, 2008; McKee, 2011; McKee et al., 2017). For instance, Will and Jo (30s, male and female) conveyed an aspiration for homeownership, as they ‘wanted to stop renting and own a house’. Will and Jo recently established a non-profit bird rehab sanctuary together, and are currently working to grow their business to provide themselves with more financial security, as they hope to have a family. Nine participants rented and could not access traditional housing prior to adopting the THL, and most spoke negatively of their experience in the rental market. Thus, homeownership provided by the THL offered an opportunity to reach a more desirable and responsible stratum for dwellers who could not access traditional housing. A common sentiment across participants regarding the financial irresponsibility of renting was explained by Pete (early 30s, male), who is a professional magician and lives with his partner, and his outright reference to the American dream:

‘I looked at it as tiny house vs rent...right now I’m renting and the money is going nowhere...I’m paying for someone else’s dream.’

Dwellers’ accounts highlight the internalisation of housing discourses that suggest homeownership as the more responsible way of being housed, emphasising the success of neoliberal governing practices that promote traditional homeownership in order to take the burden off the state and govern the individual into taking responsibility (Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McKee et al., 2017).

For many dwellers, the THL is part of the pursuit of the contemporary American dream, as it offers an innovative method to support the eventual realisation of the dream of more traditional homeownership. The THL offers these dwellers a low-cost lifestyle now in order to have more financial stability and thus prosperity in the future, while still providing a version of homeownership. Essentially, as the traditional route to this homeownership aspiration is unavailable for many of these dwellers, they have taken an alternative and innovative path to achieve this superior choice. The THL thus is used as a method to get around being considered a ‘flawed’ consumer and overcome the ‘fallacy of choice’ around the traditional housing market (Flint, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). Therefore, these dwellers have adapted aspirations and are very much pursuing their version of the American dream via the THL in order to save now to follow other aspirations in the future. An argument supported by the fact that many dwellers stated that they did not see the tiny home as a forever home when asked outright, as reflected in the following accounts:

‘I don’t. I see it as my indefinite home... I’ll build a small house on a foundation about double the size of this house...Then I’ll probably keep this as a guesthouse.’ (Alice, late 20s, female)

‘I wouldn’t be opposed to getting a foundation house. I would want something like 600 ft² (55 m²) if I were to get married and have a family and all that. I don’t think I’ll ever go back to the traditional American dream of the giant house and all that.’ (Joel, late 20s, male)

‘I would say it’s for quite a long time. I was thinking that it would be a forever home but I don’t think it’ll be. I’m not sure where I’ll end up living or if I’d like to move.

Eventually I'd like to have a tiny or small house on a foundation for the utilities.' (Cara, mid 20s, female)

As presented, several dwellers have aspirations for housing beyond the THL, revealing the ways in which they are using tiny living to pursue more traditional homeownership. However, most expressed the desire to live well below the average sized American house of over 200 m² after experiencing tiny living. Therefore, small living allowed them to re-evaluate what they want from their home space. For example, Joel (late 20s, male) aspires to build on a foundation in the future if his familial situation changes, as he is currently single and hopes to find a partner and have a family. This suggests that the THL is in fact a temporary housing situation that will be abandoned as life progresses. Interestingly, many expressed the desire to build a house on a foundation, supporting the accounts of feeling unstable and less grounded living on wheels. Indeed, Joshua (mid 30s, male), who works part-time for a non-profit and lives in the home with his partner and two year old, linked this back to the more general fragile state of housing:

'It doesn't feel that grounded, it feels like we are detached from the earth because there are wheels underneath us, it's rocky... It's a constant reminder every couple weeks when the wind blows that you are in this fragile state of housing.'

At the same time, the extent to which these future home aspirations can or will be realised is unknown, as choice around self-build and designed homes are restricted by developers and city planners that often prioritise larger homes (Gopal and Perlberg, 2015). Thus, this requires acquiring one's own land, a substantial cost for these dwellers that are looking to get on their feet. Therefore, future housing choices will be restricted by neoliberal policies that incentivise individual responsibility within the parameters of the neoliberal mentality of rule, just as they are currently for these individuals.

This section has highlighted how the main motivation for living in a tiny house was freedom and self-determination, fundamental aspects of the American dream. These dwellers presented in this section, those that 'choose' this housing due to 'constraints' imposed upon them (i.e., that they cannot afford a traditional home), made compromises and adaptations to their aspirations, and intend to use this as a stepping stone for the future, are termed 'Compromisers' within this thesis. A second type of tiny house dweller was identified, termed 'Detractors', these dwellers 'choose' this lifestyle not because they are outright 'constrained' around traditional housing but to avoid the burdens of the mortgage trap. The next section delves

further into these types and claims of financial freedom, exploring and questioning these offerings.

4.3 Avoiding the mortgage trap (Detractors) or a stepping stone to future aspirations (Compromisers): two types of tiny home dwellers

Most dwellers were primarily driven by financial freedom to adopt the THL, while all expressed some form of financial freedom found via the THL. These themes arose organically, in a bottom up way unprompted by the researcher. Some expressions of freedom and self-determination occurred in describing the experience of tiny house living after adoption rather than as a direct motivator.

In an attempt to explore these expressions of freedom and thus the motivation for adoption of this lifestyle, two distinct types were developed in relation to the American dream, traditional homeownership, and the debt market. These types are used in subsequent sections and chapters, as they act as a mechanism to understand the ways in which participants relate to the traditional housing market, allowing for a more reflective review of dweller accounts. This section develops and justifies these types, and provides insight around the several ways in which dwellers identify financial freedom within the THL. Types include:

- (1) Detractors, made up of ‘mortgage avoiders’, dwellers financially able, yet unwilling, to access the traditional market, and ‘former homeowners’, previous traditional market homeowners.
- (2) Compromisers, those pursuing an adapted version of the contemporary American dream (homeownership) as a result of being ‘constrained’ and not having the ability to access the traditional housing market for financial reasons.

Rose’s (2000) notion of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’, which argues that neoliberal governance works through promoting the superiority of self-motivated, empowered and responsible individuals, is used to frame the relationship of both of these types to taking responsibility over housing. Expressions of freedom, individuality and choice, as well as the critique of traditional institutions and the restrictive nature of the THL occurred across both types. Table 4.1 presents dweller attributes (i.e. age, house cost and house financing) for Detractors and Compromisers to aid comparison of the two types. Following this, participant case studies are presented, then each type is theoretically justified and empirically reviewed.

Table 4.1 Dweller details by type

| Detractors | | | Compromisers | | |
|-------------|--|---|--------------|------------------------|--|
| Owner's age | Cost of building home | Financing | Owner's age | Cost of building home | Financing |
| mid 30s | 30,000 (self-designed) | 5 year loan, 3.9% interest | early 30s | 25,000 (DIY build) | Paid with savings and credit cards |
| early 50s | 134,000 (converted accessory unit) | Cash from sale of former house | mid 30s | 30,000 (self-designed) | Paid with savings and a peer to peer loan |
| early 40s | Declined to share (bought on Craigslist) | Paid outright with savings | mid 20s | 80,000 (self-designed) | Paid with college fund & 2 year loan |
| late 30s | 65,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings | late 20s | 25,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings |
| mid 40s | 35,000 (partial DIY build) | Cash from sale of former house | late 20s | 50,000 (self-design) | 5 year personal loan |
| mid 60s | 35,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings | mid 30s | 15,000 (DIY build) | Put on credit cards |
| early 50s | 75,000 (self-designed) | Paid outright with savings | mid 20s | 8,800 (DIY build) | Paid outright with help from grandparents |
| late 40s | 35,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings | late 20s | 78,000 (self-designed) | 15 year RV loan |
| mid 60s | 35,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings | mid 30s | 40,000 (DIY build) | Paid outright with savings and family help |
| early 40s | 20,000 (bought on Craigslist) | Paid outright with savings - land and house | | | |
| mid 60s | 145,000 (self-designed) | Paid outright with savings | | | |

Next, cases studies of a few participants are presented to situate these types within real-life dweller experience. A short biography on two participants from each type is provided, including a brief career and housing history, and an examination of their ‘path’ to the THL. This aids in showing the various ‘points’ from which dwellers entered the THL and the ‘choices’, compromises, and adaptations involved in shifting housing trajectories.

Detractors

Kristin (mid 40s, female) lives in a tiny home (24 m² (255 ft²) plus two lofts) with her teen daughter (age 16). Kristin grew up in Texas and completed her undergraduate degree in the state, later moving with her daughter to Vermont to pursue a master's degree. She continued to live and work in Vermont and bought her traditional sized home (140 m² (1500 ft²)). After several years, she and her daughter were unsatisfied living in this way. She described working so much to afford the large house that she could not enjoy. Her daughter loves to ride horses and wanted to have horses of her own; this was not possible as their house was in the city centre. She decided to sell the house, leave her job, and move across the country to the Pacific Northwest. They downsized their items and moved in a 1971 Airstream RV, staying in her mom's guesthouse temporarily in Seattle. Kristin stumbled upon the idea of a tiny house after driving passed a tiny house company and decided then and there to purchase a tiny home kit. With permission from the company, Kristin and her daughter moved onto the company's lot in their RV, with a plan of building the tiny home at that location. Kristin began working for the company. They were asked to be on a tiny house television show, which filmed the process for several weeks. Kristin and her daughter currently live on rural land in Washington State, which includes pasture for their rescued horses. Kristin continues to do some work for the company, and works as an insurance adjuster. Her daughter takes her high school courses online – she plans to move away for university in the coming years. They have lived in the house for almost one year.

Jackie (early 50s, female) lives in her tiny home, just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, on a piece of land with a main house. The home is 31 m² (330 ft²) plus a loft. Jackie has previously lived in a four-bedroom, three bathroom house that was 204 m² (2200 ft²). However, after her daughter moved out for college in the last few years, she downsized to a two bedroom apartment that was approximately 140 m² (1500 ft²). She is a digital consultant for a bank, and also works as a tiny house consultant. Jackie has wanted to adopt a low-cost and mobile living situation for a long time but waited until her daughter moved out to do so. She initially looked into an RV but quickly realised the cost was too high. Jackie decided on a tiny house after seeing them in media and online. She designed the home along with friends who work in the building industry and her build process was featured on a tiny house television show. Jackie does not find the home as mobile as she had hoped and is considering Airbnb'ing the home to travel more. She does not enjoy living so far from the city; however, acknowledges that this is necessary due to legality issues. Jackie's home is state-of-the-art as she was adamant about wanting to maintain elements of luxury she had grown used to, such as a walk-in closet. Jackie has lived in the home for about 1.5 years.

Compromisers

Will and Jo (mid 30s, male and female) live in their tiny home on land in rural Texas, renting from the property owner. They used a peer-to-peer loan to finance the home, which is 27 m² (287 ft²). Before the tiny home, Will and Jo rented an average sized one bedroom apartment near Dallas, Texas, approximately 93 m² (1000 ft²). Will and Jo both described growing up in averaged sized homes. They were introduced to the lifestyle by a friend and were inspired after touring her home. Will drew the plans for the home, and while they originally planned to build the home themselves, they heard about the casting of a television show and were selected. Both Will and Jo recently left the restaurant service industry (where they met) to establish a non-profit bird rehab sanctuary. They travel to schools and other events to teach about birds; their 25 rescued birds live on the property with them. Their goal is to eventually buy a piece of land for their sanctuary and build a house on a foundation, not more than 65 m² (700 ft²), acknowledging that a larger space is needed when they have children. They, too, found moving the home difficult and plan to hire professional movers when they relocate in the future. Will and Jo have lived in the home for 1.5 years.

Alice (late 20s, female) lives in her tiny home on a ranch outside of Jackson, Wyoming, where she parks free of charge in exchange for helping around the property and cooking for the owners. The home is 20 m² (220 ft²) with the loft. Alice moved to this area several years ago for a winter sport guide position. She is currently a waitress at a local restaurant, cleans houses, and gardens for the neighbour, among other 'odd jobs'. She now considers this area home; however, it is burdened with an extreme housing shortage and exceptionally high prices. She previously lived in a two bedroom townhouse with a roommate in the area, but it was sold. Alice initially considered a camper van but decided on a tiny home after doing research online. Alice was on the brink of being homeless in just a few weeks time, so decided to buy the home from Tumbleweed builder. She was able to get a bank loan from a credit union, after being denied by her long-term banking institution. Tumbleweed homes are RV certified, thus allowing Alice to access an RV loan. She wants to eventually build a house on a foundation about double the size of the tiny home. Alice has lived in the home for two years.

Following this, rooted in the conceptual understanding of this thesis, each type is further reviewed and justified. Empirical accounts are presented to support claims and allow the THL dweller 'voice' to be heard.

4.3.1 Detractors

This type consists of 11 households (14 participants), ranging in age from mid 30s to 60s, and refers to those who are acting out against the contemporary American dream of traditional

homeownership and the resultant mortgage encumbrance. Two households are single mothers with teen children, three are couples, and the remainder are single (three women and three men). Two households are retired, while one couple left their jobs to establish a tiny house community. Career type includes: retired investment banker, former engineer and tax and finance specialist, digital consultant for a bank, project manager for a consulting firm, IT consultant, director of psychological health for a military instalment, nurse, former lawyer, insurance adjuster, building design consultant, and professor of architecture. Detractors reside in the following states: Washington, Texas, Georgia, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, New York, New Hampshire, Virginia, California, and North Carolina. These dwellers are, according to their own description, financially able yet unwilling to join the traditional housing market ('mortgage avoiders') or have abandoned the traditional housing market ('former traditional homeowners'). This type is inspired by Foucault's notion of 'counter-conducts', or individual efforts at crafting the 'self' to interrupt forces governing or constructing the individual (Foucault, 2007). Detractors were driven by unsatisfying experiences with and distrust of traditional housing, mortgage reliance, and debt, and working too much to support this 'normalised' lifestyle resulting in being exhausted and unhappy. As opposed to Compromisers, Detractors were not 'constrained' into the THL, but have adopted this lifestyle because it offers a 'choice' outside of traditional institutions. Notably, these individuals have developed themselves and their lifestyles around living in and detracting from traditional housing, and this is critical to explore when considering the development of subjectivities.

Most Detractors were seeking financial security, flexibility, and stability. For example, Jackie (early 50s, female) sought flexibility in focusing on 'important' things through reduced expenses:

'I wanted something where my expenses were a lot lower and allow me to focus more on the things that I feel are important.'

Detractors identified a sense of freedom in taking control over a housing market that has proven untrustworthy and dissatisfactory for them. Many dwellers emphasised the lack of contentment and fulfilment around prior traditional choices due to the need to afford this normalised lifestyle in order to not be considered a 'flawed' consumer of housing (Flint, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). Specifically, for instance, Cameron (early 40s, male), who worked as an IT consultant for 18 years before adopting the THL and leaving his job to pursue his passion of permaculture, noted:

‘I had a really big apartment and a brand new vehicle and all the things you are supposed to have and it was a really unsatisfying experience.’

George (mid 60s, male), a retired investment banker, formerly lived a life of luxury in a 465 m² house with several cars, trips around the world, and elaborate parties, making a six figure salary. Yet he abandoned this life, which at one point he thought was the definition of success, as it proved unfulfilling. Additionally, the burden of work in order to support the big house and accumulation of stuff became disillusioning:

‘It got to the point that it felt like I was working so much that it felt like I couldn't even enjoy that great big house...there wasn't time to enjoy this thing that I was working 60 hours a week to afford.’ (Kristin, mid 40s, female)

Oftentimes, these sentiments were expressed as the fact that reduced expenses allowed for a lifestyle shift from an unsatisfying experience to one more fulfilling and more in line with their passions:

‘I was on this path to really do things that resonated with me and be outdoors and all the things that I had been missing from the corporate life of always being in an office for 40 hours and being too tired to even cook after work. I got really tired of living that way.’ (Cameron, early 40s, male)

Therefore, financial freedom directly links to having more time and needing to work less, freedoms reviewed below in section 4.4.1 and 4.4.4.

Additionally, many Detractors expressed financial freedom in relation to being able to live beyond traditional housing and debt systems, and the absurdity of these systems:

‘I don't have any credit cards at all...Not only do I not have a mortgage, I don't have any debt right now at all... this big giant house that you'll be paying on for 30 years, that's not a life goal.’ (Tessa, late 30s, female)

Several conveyed freedom and pride in the fact that they are able to live outside of the mortgage system. As Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male) relayed, ‘we don't have a mortgage, so there's a lot of freedom there’. While Kristin (mid 40s, female) stated:

‘I wanted to spend the money that I had from my big house that wouldn't get me trapped in another mortgage... You know I own it free and clear. I don't have a mortgage.’

Dwellers have shifted their aspirations from traditional versions of the American dream to the THL dream. They expressed pride and freedom in abandoning this normalised version of

success, as articulated by suggestions of traditional housing and related aspects being unsatisfying, burdensome, ridiculous, untrustworthy, and entrapping. However, as noted, the primary driver was the desire for financial freedom, and almost all dwellers adopted the THL after the 2008 housing crisis. Indeed, Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male) articulated this driver, despite having made a large amount of money in Silicon Valley to buy land in Texas and start their own community:

‘You saw 2008 a lot of people lost their homes and made bad investments, we saw that in a general sense, we are always trying to save in a general sense.’

Despite their ability to access the traditional market and claims of living outside of these institutions in order to obtain freedom, all Detractors were in pursuit of financial security on some level.

Notably, neoliberalism steers individuals toward traditional housing and debt encumbrance via self-governance mechanisms (Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McIntyre and McKee, 2012). However, these dwellers have detracted from the type of subject being created by these institutions amidst an affordable housing crisis and economic uncertainty. Yet, Detractors are still aspiring to homeownership, thus suggesting these dwellers have succumbed to normalising tactics around owning a house (Gurney, 1999; Rowlands and Gurney, 2000; Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McIntyre and McKee, 2012). The strength of neoliberal governance is in the fact that individuals are unaware of being made political subjects through self-governing mechanisms (Rose, 2000). However, the opportunity for agency and resistance sits within, not in opposition, to these power mechanisms (Foucault, 1984; McKee, 2011). Therefore, Detractors resistance is engaged with in chapter 5, utilising recent Foucauldian understandings of governmentality, including considerations of activated agency, specifically Brady (2014), Bevir (2011, 2016), Bevir and Trentmann (2007); Flint (2002, 2003), Flint and Rowlands (2003), McKee (2009, 2011, 2016), and McIntyre and McKee (2008).

4.3.2 Compromisers

This type consists of nine households (ten participants), ranging in age from early 20s to mid-30s. Four households are couples, one with a small child (age two), and the remainder are single (two women and three men). Career type includes: manager for a roofing company, waitress, professional magician, aesthetician, founders of an animal rescue non-profit, student,

marketing coordinator for an NGO, project manager for a social justice NGO, and founder of a design/marketing company. Compromisers reside in the following states: Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota, Florida, Oregon, Wyoming, and Massachusetts. Many of these dwellers adopted the THL to enable them to access traditional homeownership in the future as they are currently unable to do so, according to their own description. These dwellers have been ‘constrained’ into this ‘choice’ as part of their compromised and adapted American dreams. The Compromisers are recognised in scholarship that emphasises the continuation of the pursuit of homeownership despite fading opportunity in the current neoliberal era (Harvey, 2005, 2012; Aalbers, 2015; Chomsky, 2017). Similarly to Detractors, Compromisers have been governed into recognising homeownership as the natural and optimal housing choice, which is superior to renting (Gurney, 1999; Rowlands and Gurney, 2000; Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McIntyre and McKee, 2012). Additionally, this type is supported by scholarship that highlights the growing phenomenon of ‘Generation Rent’, or younger people remaining longer in the rental sector, largely in the UK, US, and Australia (McKee, 2012; McKee et al., 2017; Ronald and Kadi, 2017; Wood and Ong, 2012). This research provides an understanding around this cohort of individuals, those in their 20s and 30s who have been priced out of traditional homeownership. These dwellers, unable to follow the traditional path, are attempting an alternative and self-reliant approach to homeownership under the stronghold of a restrictive and unaffordable housing market. As Rose’s (2000) notion of ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ argues, neoliberal governance works through promoting the superiority of the self-motivated and responsible individual, thus utilising self-governance power mechanisms to create a self-reliant population. Compromisers are using the adoption of the THL amidst economic instability to obtain homeownership and financial security now to save for future aspirations, supported by the fact that all Compromisers have housing desires beyond tiny living.

Compromisers were largely motivated by an unaffordable and undesirable rental market, desire to save for the future, opportunity to live a cheaper life, avoid a mortgage, and a housing stock shortage. Indeed, dwellers point to tiny living as providing a freedom from rental reliance yet their accounts highlight the wider affordable housing crisis. Many dwellers recounted the extreme expense of renting, as Ben (mid 30s, male), who works for a social justice NGO, articulated:

‘I’ve never owned, just spent a lot on rent...I’m 35 and rent is a pretty universally frustrating thing for people my age.’

Niko (late 20s, male), a manager for a roofing company who lives with his partner, noted:

‘We were living at the time in Washington in a 600 square foot studio apartment north of Seattle and we were paying \$1300 a month which to us was obscene.’

He stated that his desire to ‘save some cash’ was the primary motivation, as the payment on his tiny house loan is cheaper than rent. Stating that within four years he will be ‘free’. The housing crisis is further conveyed here, as related to a housing stock shortage:

‘The main motivator was our extreme housing shortage in this area... There was nothing I could afford to rent in the area. Everything was more than 100% of my income. So it was either leaving the area entirely or doing something else and I really didn’t want to leave. This area is home to me and I’d like to stay.’ (Alice, late 20s, female)

These accounts are representative of a housing market, both homeownership and rental, that has become burdensome for so many (Ronald and Kadi, 2017), particularly so for the Compromisers who are unable to access traditional homeownership, yet also find the rental market and availability of housing options restricted. However, at the same time, participants saw renting as an inferior and financially irresponsible option, a ‘flawed’ way to consume house.

Further, several Compromisers expressed the desire to avoid the traditional mortgage market. For instance, Cara (mid 20s, female), an aesthetician who used her university fund to pay for the home, detailed being motivated by a desire to live cheaply and avoid being tied to a mortgage:

‘I didn’t want to be tied down to work my life away, essentially, my mom owns her own business and I watched her kill herself with work, and I didn’t want to do that myself but I also want to experience life so keeping my expenses down was a big part, I also didn’t want to be tied to a mortgage for 30 years.’

While Joel (late 20s, male), who left a corporate job alongside the adoption of the THL and founded a design and marketing company, expressed the desire for a customised house and avoidance of paying a mortgage ‘forever’:

‘I started building my house with the intent of I wanted a place that was mine, customized, I was paying a 1000 (USD) per month for rent for a really crappy apartment.’

He described the ‘crappy’ housing options both to rent and buy, stating his aversion to being ‘trapped in a mortgage’ and explaining that his adoption was ultimately about having a ‘cheap place to live’. This desire to avoid the traditional mortgage market occurred despite the fact that it is was not accessible to these individuals. Therefore, these expressions regarding not getting stuck or tied to this traditional debt system should be understood in that context. Indeed, many Compromisers obtained financial assistance to adopt the THL as most used small loans, credit cards, or aid from family to pay for their homes. Additionally, Compromisers expressed future home aspirations beyond the THL, thus suggesting dwellers are using this housing option as a means to save for future more ‘traditional’ homeownership. Several Compromisers expressed their desire for partners and/or children in future, which links to their use of the THL as a ‘stepping stone’, as several acknowledged the want for other housing when or if this occurs. Clearly, this type is representative of those early in their housing careers, and the THL is acting as a temporary solution.

At the same time, many expressed criticism of the institutions of traditional housing and debt encumbrance, suggesting that they consider the adoption of the THL to be an act of resistance. Whether these dwellers can claim to be acting against or in resistance to institutions not available to them and how these claims fit into their aspirations beyond the THL is returned to in chapter 5.

Empirical accounts of both Compromisers and Detractors support claims of the utilisation of self-governing mechanisms and ethopolitics to steer housing choices, as highlighted across the literature (for example Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011; McIntyre and McKee, 2008). Compromisers were ‘constrained’ into this ‘choice’, as witnessed by their adapted American dreams, while Detractors are acting out against restrictive and burdensome institutions. However, for both types, this lifestyle was adopted due to financial purposes in an era of financial instability, the result of oppressive neoliberal policies. Yet all dwellers identified freedom in this opportunity to live a more affordable lifestyle, and even attached notions of empowerment to the acquisition of this form of housing. Therefore, there is implication that these dwellers were made to feel free by the suggestion of ‘choice’ over

housing and the ability to have more resources, despite these being a reaction to an unstable and uncertain economy; this is supported by Rose's (1999a) claims that the notion of freedom is fundamental to strategies used to govern the 'self'. Furthermore, these empirical accounts link to Cruikshank's (1999) argument that the 'will to empower' targets the 'poor' to become active and participatory, whereby these governable subjects are mobilised and empowered to take control over their lives. Arguably, this is relevant to these participants seeking financial stability around housing. Although, as Cruikshank (1999) explains, this is not always ill-intentioned, it further divides those willing and able to 'act' from those unable. These 'inactive' individuals are often then problematised (Flint, 2004). Therefore, these dwellers are potentially driven to be those that 'act' to avoid being the problematised and irresponsible, finding freedom in this process. However, there is also the acknowledgment that these individuals were able to be those that 'act', as they had sufficient means to fund such an endeavour, despite financial drivers.

In addition, the variance in life course between each type was evident and revealed the difference in attachment to the THL. Indeed, all Compromisers are seeking other housing options, and many have desires for partners and/or families in the future; several of which acknowledged the impracticability of living tiny with children. One Compromiser household included a small child (two years), but this participant is trying to sell the home. In contrast, Detractors consist of individuals later in life, and while some did express a desire for a partner and several have children (teen or adult), no Detractor articulated plans for children in the future. Two Detractor households were single mothers with teen children, one of which spoke of privacy as a concern, prompting them to consider building another tiny house for the daughter. While some Detractors were dissatisfied with aspects of the THL, fewer Detractors have other future housing aspirations. Certainly, as discussed, these types represent different life stages and thus different relationships to housing. Therefore, the THL differs in how it impacts upon housing trajectories for each type, and this is considered throughout this thesis.

While empirical evidence suggests that dwellers are primarily adopting this lifestyle for financial reasons in order to find stability in unstable times, dwellers attached notions of freedom, being free from/free to, and self-determination to other aspects of the THL. These are reviewed below to further determine motivations around adoption of the THL and explore understandings of freedom.

4.4 Self-determination and the benefits of the THL

The following freedoms of the THL, explained as benefits, were identified by dweller accounts, from most to least discussed: (1) freeing up time and energy: simplification; (2) self-build and self-expression; (3) freedom of mobility; (4) freedom to work less; and (5) freedom from utilities and regulation. Table 4.2 presents empirical evidence to support these freedoms and the implications of these accounts. This section explores each benefit and the aim is to reveal the extent to which dwellers are subjectified by a governing of rationalities and thus reveal how freely they are choosing the THL. In order to position these expressions of freedom, the restrictive nature of the THL and things sacrificed are presented when relevant to the articulated freedom. These arose when inquiring directly in semi-structured interviews, in contrast to the ways in which freedom claims arose without prompting. This analysis aids in further investigation around the ways in which dwellers have been governed into understanding their freedom.

Table 4.2 Implications of expressed freedoms/benefits

| Freedom/benefit of the THL | Dweller example | Implications, words used |
|--|--|--|
| Freeing up time and energy: simplification | 'I think the thing I most enjoy is the freedom of my time and my energy, and being able to direct that into places I want to see it go, instead of waking up and feeling you have all these pressures to pay these bills so you can have all these things. It's really a sense of freedom when you can scale everything down.' (Cameron, early 40s, male, Detractor) | Trade-off, easier life, more enjoyment, emotional benefits, priorities, 'focus on things I feel are important', 'anxiety off my shoulders' |
| Self-build and self-expression | 'I liked building it, I liked the sense of freedom, the sense of empowerment from building the house, living in this way that was more on my terms.' (Ben, mid 30s, male, Compromiser) | Pride, empowerment, ownership, meeting needs, meaningfulness, 'extension of me' |
| Freedom of mobility | 'I wanted the freedom to move my life in whatever direction it took me.' (Cara, mid 20s, female, Compromiser) | Flexibility, not being trapped to a location, movement, options |
| Freedom to work less | 'I've got a tiny house that's paid off. I've got a car that's paid off. Why do I need to work full time? I don't have a mortgage. I mean that's what people work for, right? To pay things off, I'm debt free.' (Bill, early 60s, male, Detractor) | Enjoyment, control, more time, priorities, easier life, align with values, don't have to work 'a regular job', work from home |
| Freedom from utilities and regulation | 'Being off grid I feel more free and independent of whatever else may be happening.' (Alice, late 20s, female, Compromiser) | Avoid restrictive system, control, on my term, according to my standards |

4.4.1 Freeing up time and energy: simplification

Freedom around living a simpler lifestyle, including having more time and energy, was articulated by 13 dwellers. The language around these accounts suggested that life was easier and more enjoyable after adopting this lifestyle. This benefit ties directly to both financial freedom and freedom around employment, as noted:

‘It has freed up my energy. I like things to be clean and tidy, it doesn't take long to clean the whole house. It has freed up money which has freed up time. I have more time to sleep in or go putter around my garden and take photos of the wildlife.’ (Alice, late 20s, female, Compromiser)

Several spoke of an emotional freedom whereby they felt less anxious and stressed. For example, Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor) stated, ‘it has brought me a lot of emotional security and anxiety off my shoulders’. Jackie (late 40s, female, Detractor) agreed, stating how she doesn’t ‘have to be stressed out...because you’ve taken care of some of the expenses’. Debbie (early 30s, female, Detractor) noted:

‘I enjoy how simple it is, I [was] worried as a homeowner [about] what if something happens, but it is a small house...it’s just the simplicity of it all.’

Additionally, several stated how they can now focus on things they find important because they can work less due to reduced expenses:

‘I wanted to...not spend time and money on the things that weren't important.’ (Cara, mid 20s, female, Compromiser)

As relayed in his account in Table 4.2, Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) found a great deal of freedom in having more time and less pressure to pay bills. He also found a new sense of self with all this time and energy, as he explained:

‘[Now] I do much more than survive, I have a rich life, and just being able to spend the amount of time that I do preparing food is a huge deal to me. I never wanted to do that when I was working corporate, my health is improved. I have time to meditate every morning, I have as much time as I need to start my day, those type of things are invaluable, there's something that when the first thing you do is hear an alarm and you think about the traffic and you quick scarf down some crappy food and you rush off to drink coffee in the office that you hate...I’m 41 and I’ve done that for a while.’

Several dweller expressions link to the notion of self-governing practices (Foucault, 1988) because these individuals felt the need to excel and optimise the ‘self’ even under these unstable

neoliberal political times. Therefore, these dwellers are using the THL to maintain this pursuit of the superior 'self', or their 'project of the self', focusing on 'important' things, while also reducing the burden of economic uncertainty (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Understandably, then, many felt empowered by this lifestyle. However, this also supports the suggestion that the adoption of the THL is the result of unstable neoliberal policies creating burdensome circumstances.

Furthermore, the 'freedom' to 'choose' how one spends his or her time and energy suggests the potential for autonomy within the throngs of these governing practices. Indeed, some dwellers explained how they now have more opportunity to spend their time and money on goods and experiences not available to them before:

'I'm traveling more, I'm also partying every weekend, blowing money on alcohol, I don't have kids so I live weekend to weekend, I'm like 'oh what do I want to do this weekend?.' (Tessa, late 30s, female, Detractor)

Indeed, this aspect of the THL offers the opportunity for subjects to 'negotiate' the ways in which they are being governed. This highlights the messiness of governing practices and the potential for dwellers to be productive and not become the subjects they are intended to (McKee, 2011).

4.4.2 Self-build and self-expression: 'The style is very me'

Over half of the dwellers expressed choice, individuality, and feelings of empowerment around having control over the design and build of their house, yet many had previously acknowledged being driven by financial benefits. For example, Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor), stated her motivation for adoption was due to the financial burden of a 30-year mortgage from her previous house. However, Kristin went on to describe the autonomy she felt by getting to pick out small aspects of the home, explaining:

'We got to pick out everything: the stain colour, floors, appliances, countertops. You name it, we picked it out. So by the end it felt like our project and it was really a reflection of our style and everything.'

Further, Jackie (late 40s, female, Detractor) spoke about the planning, design, and building process:

‘It went from a concept to actual reality and sitting and living in it...it’s empowering that this was a concept (tiny living) that nobody understood and it turned out so wonderful.’

Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser), who expressed the primary motivation of avoiding an entrapping mortgage system and living with more financial ease, found freedom and identity in the small decisions of the home design:

‘My house is very much an extension of me, being that I got to pick out everything from the layout to the placement of outlet and light ceilings and the style is very me and I feel I’m home and not just in a place where my things are.’

Similarly, Will and Jo (late 20s, male and female, Compromisers) discussed their self-design process: ‘every piece we love...it is totally us, every piece makes me happy...every piece about the house is all about us’.

The notable aspect of these expressions around self-design and DIY is that freedom and empowerment is attached to restricted choices. After all, while many do not get to build a home from the ground up in the traditional market, this customisability and choice is not unique to the THL. For many, the home is the centrepiece of choice, individual expression, identity building and social happenings (Gurney, 1999; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Being able to have choice around décor (e.g. paint colour, stains, countertops and lighting) is an important aspect of homemaking in general, and many of those adopting the THL take satisfaction in making ‘every aspect’ of their home a representation of themselves, which is more restricted under the rental market (Easthope, 2014; McKee and Soaita, 2018). This lifestyle was sought due to financial stability in unstable times, yet dwellers identified freedom in having choice over their home space. The process of self-designing and building one’s home was empowering and a way in which dwellers attached identity to the space. This again supports the idea that these dweller have come to and experience this lifestyle under a restrictive system.

Eight dwellers built their houses themselves, with some hiring specialists when needed. The process of building the home entirely did offer a unique opportunity for these eight, as all of them expressed a sense of empowerment in being able to construct their own dwelling. For instance, Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser) noted the uniqueness, stating ‘I think there’s not very many people these days that can say, “I built my own home with my own two hands”’. However, while these expressions of freedom around choice and individuality related to

building one's own house are not insincere, as the opportunity is less common even within traditional housing, the frequent articulation of the restrictive nature of the THL by these very dwellers, as well as the financial motivations, brings them into question.

Despite these expressions of freedom and empowerment offered by the building process, several dwellers conveyed dissatisfaction with aspects of this self-built/self-designed space, specifically the lack of a solid foundation (for those on wheels), privacy allowances, social isolation, and hazardously steep stairs and inconvenient and cramped lofted beds.

While tiny houses can be self-built on foundations, as was done by Susan (60s, female, Detractor), who is a retired lawyer and lives with her partner, at a cost of USD 145,000, building on wheels allows for a more affordable self-build opportunity and a way to 'get around' legal issues that many face. However, a few dwellers explained that being on wheels felt less grounded and secure:

'It kind of sways back and forth. At night, my daughter is always tossing and turning, I can feel it on the opposite side of the bed. I can feel it, when she gets off of her loft, you can feel it. The suspension of the trailer goes up and down.' (Kristin, mid 40s, female, Detractor)

'Psychologically the fact that it was up off the ground, not on a solid foundation, and moveable, it somehow felt different. I felt less grounded and rooted in the world. Not the most pleasant feeling to have from one's home.' (Ben, mid 30s, male, Compromiser, who abandoned his home)

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 present the juxtaposition between a tiny house on a foundation and a tiny house of wheels in order to bring a visual understanding to these claims of a lack of grounding and of the swaying of the structure.



Figure 4.1 Debbie's tiny house on a foundation (Author's photo)



Figure 4.2 Model tiny house on wheels (Author's photo)

This restriction is important considering that nine of the 18 households on wheels expressed the desire to live on a foundation in the future. As noted, being on wheels seemed to add to both the instability and temporary nature of this housing option. This links to claims that this lifestyle is being used by some to address housing problems and save for the future, whether this objective was decided before or after adoption. Furthermore, restrictions and/or sacrifices related to the spatial aspects of the home arose. For example, the 17-year-old daughter of Debbie (early 50s, female, Detractor) stated her dissatisfaction in not having privacy and space to hang out with friends:

‘It's just hard to have my friends over, cause it's just like, my mom is here and like we can't talk about anything because my mom is here. It's awkward.’

This privacy issue arose in all three dwellers who had children, while it was more of a concern for the two single mothers with teenage daughters. Debbie is looking to address this issue by building her daughter a small tiny house of her own.

Oscar (mid 20s, male, Compromiser) attributed the minimal space and lack of privacy to his divorce, giving advice on how to avoid this, he stated:

‘I recommend living in a tiny house alone for a while before inviting someone in, or being very comfortable with a significant other. Because you hear and smell everything no matter how much you try to hide or avoid it. There's no space in a tiny home, so you need to be very prepared and comfortable with them. A lot of divorces are happening over tiny homes.’

Additionally, one dweller noted that she felt more isolated and lonely due to the small space:

‘I thought I was going to feel less lonely in a smaller space but I think I feel more lonely. I can't put my finger on why, it doesn't make sense, it seems counter intuitive. Why would that feel more isolating?’ (Tessa, late 30s, female, Detractor).

Finally, a majority of tiny houses have lofted sleeping spaces. Manoeuvring around these spaces, as well as the need to climb steep stairs to access them, was an annoyance for some. Silvia, partner of Chris (late 40s, female and male, Detractors), broke her foot within the first weeks of living in the tiny house after falling from the stairs:

‘I climbed up on the ladder in January, I had clothes hanging on it...I slipped and broke my foot.’

Figure 4.3 and 4.4 show a typical staircase and lofted space in tiny houses on wheels:

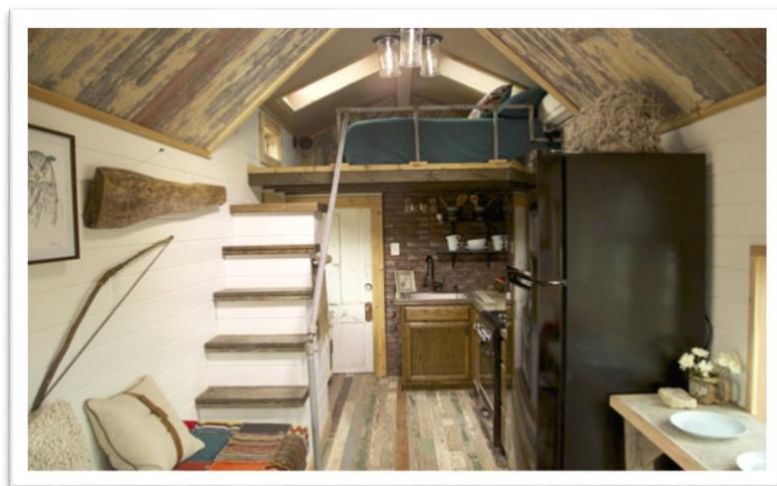


Figure 4.3 Will and Jo's stairs to loft (Dweller's photo)



Figure 4.4 Cara's loft (Dweller's photo)

Jo, partner of Will (mid 30s, male and female, Compromisers), spoke of her dissatisfaction with the height of the loft and her desire to live in a bigger space in the future:

‘I least enjoy having such a short bedroom where I can't stand up, so when we do eventually live on a property... I would love to have a bedroom I could stand up in.’

Furthermore, a couple of dwellers explained their concerns with having to climb steep stairs as they age. These were all Detractors and identified that in order to continue with this lifestyle as they get older, this needed to be considered. In fact, Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male, Detractors) spoke of ways in which they could shift aspects of the home to move the bed downstairs. George (mid 60s, male, Detractor) chose not to have a lofted space for this very reason, as presented in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5 George's tiny house (Dweller's photo)

These articulations of issues with aspects of the THL, while largely minor, could significantly impact the potential for this housing option to offer a long-term solution for these dwellers and others. Indeed, most dwellers have lived in these homes for only one to two years, therefore, the impact of these restrictions is uncertain. Again, these restrictions are representative of the ways in which the expressions of freedom around the THL are not as clear-cut as suggested by dwellers.

Arguably, dwellers have adjusted their understandings of ‘choice’ around housing, settling for the ability to choose small aspects of the design process, such as the location of the electrical outlets or paint colours. These articulations should be understood amidst the claim that ‘choice is a chief vehicle of governmentality in the construction of advanced liberal subjects’ (Bevir, 2013, p. 109). While, again, this opportunity for ‘freedom’ to ‘choose’ even these small aspects of the house has the potential for autonomy amidst these governing practices and for subjects to ‘negotiate’ the ways in which they are being governed (McKee, 2011).

4.4.3 Freedom of mobility

Half of the dwellers expressed freedom around the flexibility of movement and not being restricted to a location:

‘Being able to have the flexibility of knowing that I can go anywhere I want to go with my house and take it with me and not feeling trapped on location feels so much freer.’
(Kristin, mid 40s, female, Detractor)

Several dwellers noted that the THL made relocating for a job easier:

‘I’m just like if I got my dream job tomorrow in Seattle then I’d be calling the moving company like come and hitch up.’ (Pete, early 30s, Compromiser)

Here, dwellers are justifying their adoption of the THL as providing flexibility around house and location. Additionally, these dwellers see this opportunity to relocate without the hassle of selling and buying a house or finding affordable housing as a freedom:

‘It allows you to have the mobility to go tomorrow, move the house, drive there, and the set- up time is probably an hour, and our house is good to go.’ (Silvia and Chris, late 40s, female and male, Detractors)

These dwellers are taking responsibility over their housing, to ensure that they are housed no matter their location under the current unstable economic situation defined by unstable housing and job market. Dwellers see this stability in housing as freeing rather than a fundamental human right, showing the strength of power mechanisms that push self-reliance and responsibility.

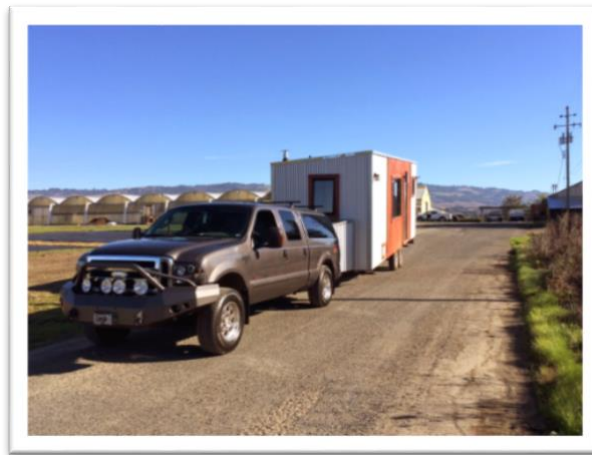


Figure 4.6 George pulling his tiny house (Dweller's photo)

Figure 4.6 shows George (mid 60s, male, Detractor) pulling his tiny home. He is one of the few dwellers that moves his home frequently around the country, as many found this to be too burdensome.

Indeed, despite these expressions of freedom around mobility and having choice of location, there were some (unexpected) limitations to this, such as the high cost and lack of ease to move a tiny home, and restrictions on parking due to zoning. Mobility was identified as a restriction for five dwellers, with most stating an assumption of more mobility prior to adoption. Many, however, still acknowledged that the option to relocate with the home was a positive aspect of the THL, but that moving the home frequently was less feasible. Dwellers found the home bulky, heavy, and requiring professional help to move:

‘It was initially my intention to move the house...now I don't know that I'll move my house. I'm not really a visual person so I initially saw myself as you know just hitching up my house and moving it but now that I've built it and it's a little intimidating for me to move.’ (Jackie, early 50s, female, Detractor)

‘My house requires me to hire a professional mover and it’s expensive. It’s not something you can move often.’ (Joel, late 20s, male, Compromiser)

Figures 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9 show the size and awkward shapes of these structures that has led many dwellers to have issues with transporting these homes frequently.



Figure 4.7 Tiny house at community (Author’s photo)



Figure 4.8 Cara’s tiny house (Dweller’s photo)



Figure 4.9 Jackie's tiny house (Dweller's photo)

Two dwellers are trying to sell their homes due to this restriction. Both desire to live a more mobile lifestyle and are looking to downsize further and live in converted short buses. One of these dwellers, Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor), articulated these restrictions around mobility, which echoed other dweller accounts:

‘I think a lot of people romanticize being able to tow their houses around behind their truck. It's not a camper, it's made out of wood. There are nails in there, if you keep hitting bumps in the road eventually it is going to get a little wonky. They aren't plastic boxes on wheels, they are houses. They are nice, they are well-built, but you don't want to be hauling them full-time.’

In addition, several dwellers highlighted the fact that the THL is more of a ‘real house’ than a recreational vehicle (RV) while also mobile. Therefore, a few of these participants, with incorrect assumptions around the ease and convenience of moving a tiny home, were unsatisfied with this aspect of the THL. Furthermore, eight dwellers articulated issues with parking the house or being dissatisfied with having to park farther from an urban area, feeling isolated or unable to bike to work. This issue prompted two dwellers to attempt to sell their tiny houses. One dweller, Ben (mid 30s, male, Compromiser), abandoned his home and moved back to the urban area due to parking issues, explaining:

‘Living in the suburbs with this tiny house that I built, I felt disconnected so I was just like, well for my own happiness and well-being, I need to go back to the place where I felt my life was.’

Joshua (early 30s, male, Compromiser) explained why he is trying to sell his tiny house:

‘The unfortunate thing about where we live is that it is illegal to live in a tiny house in the city and quasi-illegal to live in a tiny house outside the city in the county. That's kinda the reason that we are selling it, we are connected to this area, we want to keep our jobs and be close to town but we just can't live in it legally.’

Finally, Niko (late 30s, male, Compromiser) articulated his reasons for selling:

‘We just want to get some clarification to figure out how we can live in it... You have to live like you are breaking the law. They make you feel like you are doing something wrong. I don't want to feel that way... I don't want to do anything illegal. They almost force you to feel like you are doing something wrong, and it's like, “What? I'm just living”.’

Therefore, these accounts suggest a more restrictive housing scenario for individuals looking to live in a location that supports their livelihoods, causing three dwellers to abandon or try to abandon a home that they invested time and money in. These parking issues are the result of restrictive zoning and coding laws that do not allow for small houses. While most placed the blame on these institutions, still, these acknowledgements were made in conjunction with expressing the many freedoms this lifestyle allowed.

4.4.4 Freedom to work less

Half of the dwellers articulated freedom around employment to be a benefit of the THL, which was related to financial freedom because it allowed dwellers the ability to reduce their workload or at least reduce stresses around work stability. The adoption of the THL has expanded massively since the 2008 recession, whereby many were burdened by unstable job and housing markets, and even those who were not directly impacted took notice. Dwellers commented on the relief of having security of a home:

‘Now I know that if I were to lose my job or if I were to become disabled and I couldn't work, whatever life could throw at me, at least I have a roof over my head for me and my daughter. It is paid and nobody can take it away from us. It is a lot of security and freedom at the same time.’ (Kristin, mid 40s, female, Detractor)

For Kristin and others like her, the THL offers reassurance around housing and employment. Essentially, dwellers are seeking and prioritising security, yet identifying this security as a freedom. However, many dwellers identified the ways in which their traditional way of work was unsatisfying and unfulfilling whereas the THL allowed them to work fewer hours, which

resulted in more time with family and the opportunity to pursue passions that ‘align with [their] values’ (Cameron, early 40s, male, Detractor). These dwellers were indeed acting out against this notion of traditional work, one that is governed into society, under the meritocracy myth. For example:

‘I don’t have to make that much money to provide for myself. I actually have been able to go to half-time work. I only work 20 hours per week. It allows me a lot more time with my son and my family, and to do the things that I want to do outside of work.’ (Joshua, mid 30s, male, Compromiser)

‘I probably work 15-20 hours a week. I’m basically semi-retired. It’s nice and the work that I do now, I want to work. If I get a client who is awful I can turn them down. If I was trapped in a mortgage, I would have to take every single job and honestly I’d still be at the agency that I hated.’ (Joel, late 20s, male, Compromiser)

‘I’m on this path to really do things that resonate with me and be outdoors and all the things that I had been missing from the corporate life of always being in an office for 40 hours.’ (Cameron, early 40s, male, Detractor)

Interestingly, many noted that this freedom was identified only after adopting the THL. While pushing back against this core American value of productivity under a capitalistic regime is notable, this freedom found in life beyond excessive working in order to house oneself is telling of the power of the overarching neoliberal governance.

The following ethnographic observation presents the way tiny living shifted work requirements and opportunities for two dwellers at the Orlando Lakefront Tiny House Community:

Field diary entry, 9th of November 2016

Wandering the tiny house community, I came across two dwellers out and about. I was curious about their work schedules as it was midday on a Wednesday. After chatting to each, separately, it became clear that both worked non-traditionally. One dweller, out with his dog, explained that he has a remote job with a company several states away. He was eager to share that he had a non-restrictive schedule and mostly set his own hours, although he did cut our conversation short as he needed to get on

the phone for a work call. The other dweller that I encountered was a musician in a band and lived in a tiny house on a foundation in the community when he wasn't touring around the Southeast United States. He explained that due to the low cost of the tiny home, it is easy for him to tour and come and go as his music career demands. Clearly, this lifestyle offered these dwellers opportunities around work that both viewed as unlike prior living situations, as it allowed them to work as they pleased.

4.4.5 Freedom from utilities and regulation

A little less than half of the dwellers expressed freedom with regard to avoiding regulation and/or having control over utilities. These sentiments included notions of avoiding restrictive systems, living on their own terms and according to their own standards. These dwellers primarily felt freedom around not having to be linked to the larger electricity grid, gas and water mains, being able to use renewables now or in the future (as several stated that they plan to use solar in the future), and being more in touch with water and energy usage:

‘When we are in houses that are attached to a grid something you don't have to be that involved with, when you are apart from that, it makes you so much more aware of your use of energy, how much you are actually using.’ (Joshua, mid 30s, male, Compromiser)

Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male, Detractors), who founded a tiny house community, adopted the THL as it allowed them to live in alignment with their Libertarian values. They explained:

‘We don't like codes and we don't like regulation, we think it hinders creativity and progress. We know we will do it better and customize it to suit us, so when government goes ahead and makes regulation and when you generalize stuff it is never optimal, when you give people the freedom to do what they want, they will optimize it.’

This freedom is notable as these dwellers have the opportunity to take control over these fundamental resources to some extent, although, only two dwellers were living entirely off-grid.

However, some participants expressed sacrifices around utilities, finding being ‘off the grid’ burdensome or an adjustment. For example, Joshua (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) recalled how it took some getting used to in comparison to how he used to live:

‘I come from a background of taking two showers a day and just turning on the facet and using as much water as I want to just wash dishes or wash my hands, brush my teeth.’

Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor) explained how much of an adjustment the bathroom was for herself and her daughter, stating that her daughter was put off by the composting toilet. Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser) noted that ‘the utilities are much more difficult and I didn’t really anticipate that as much’ and went on to state that she regrets having a wood-burning stove:

‘I have a wood-burning stove as my heat source, and I definitely wish I would have done something else as my heat source that didn’t require so much work. I have to make the wood pieces so small and it just takes so long.’

Sacrifices around utilities were largely a matter of adjustment, most stating that the burden was not unmanageable. Nonetheless, the fact that these dwellers were still adamant about the freedom this lifestyle provided supports the claims that these dwellers have been governed into understanding what it means to have choice and self-determination around housing options.

In summary, the main motivation for dwellers to adopt the THL was financial and this supports the argument that the THL was importantly sparked by an affordable housing crisis. Yet participants expressed a range of benefits, identified as freedoms, offered by this alternative housing option, and these provide insight into the extent to which dwellers are made subjects to neoliberal self-governing mechanisms and the ways in which they are being governed by the notion of freedom. Arguably, these individuals have been governed into understanding these provisions of the THL as ‘more free’ than what is provided by traditional housing, rather than the result of a constraining neoliberal mentality of rule. The fact that the primary driver is low-cost housing and living, while neoliberal policies have created an affordable housing crisis, brings the autonomy and choice around adoption and expressions of freedoms into question. These individuals felt freedom, choice, and individuality in these many aspects that were also attached to burden or restriction. These observations highlight how the contemporary neoliberal regime operates through making people ‘feel free’, as presented in Rose’s ‘Power of Freedom’ (1999a), and uncover the embedded nature of self-governing tactics. Arguably, dwellers’ articulations of freedom and choice should be understood in the context of being governed by the desire to be deemed competent, self-reliant, and successful individuals, as the contemporary neoliberal ‘personalisation agenda’

suggests that ‘competent personhood’ happens through the ‘continual exercise of freedom’ and should be understood ‘in terms of one’s success or failure acquiring the skills and choice to actualize oneself’ (Malpass et al., 2007; Rose, 1999a, pp. 87). At the same time, dwellers acted against normalised versions of traditional housing; the ‘messiness’ of these governing practices acting as expected are explored in section 4.5.

The next section summarises findings of this chapter in order to address RQ1 and RQ2, reviewing the ways in which dwellers are both governed by and act against normalising tactics around the American dream and homeownership and notions of being ‘free’ under restrictive institutions, highlighting points of contestation.

4.5 Governing the adoption of the THL

This chapter investigated dweller accounts to explore the ‘messiness’ of governing practices at the micro-level and understand motivations for the adoption of the THL, as inspired by the recent turn in explorations of governmentalities scholarship (specifically Brady, 2014; Bevir, 2011, 2016; Bevir and Trentmann, 2007; Li 2004; Flint, 2002, 2003; McKee, 2009, 2011, 2016). This section reviews the ways in which dwellers understand their aspirations, freedom, and taking responsibility over their housing in this contemporary era. This aids in revealing actualities of motivations around adoption of the THL (RQ1). The relationship between dweller expressions of freedom and choice and neoliberal mechanisms that promote self-governance are exposed in order to reveal the extent to which dwellers are ‘choosing’ this lifestyle (RQ2) (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

Many of the proposed benefits of the THL were explained as freedoms by dwellers and were attached to aspects identified after experiencing the THL. The implications of this suggests dwellers have attached to and understand their freedom as the result of adopting this lifestyle and are justifying this decision. For instance, both Detractors and Compromisers explained the flexibility around work and no longer needing to support a traditional ‘normalised’ lifestyle in the current economic era of instability as freeing and empowering. Yet, these frequent accounts of feeling more ‘free’ as a result of not needing to worry about employment highlights a potential insecurity and the difficulties faced, especially by young people, in ‘settling down’ and accessing housing and the labour markets (Hoolachan et al., 2017, p. 63). This empirical evidence shows how freedom can be governed amidst the production of insecurities. Those

aspiring towards a 'superior existence' continuously pursue stability, identified as freedom (Rose, 1999a; Harvey, 2005). Therefore, while freedoms were expressed across these various provisions, they should not be taken without further scrutiny, and when dissected, many can be linked back to how neoliberal governance has created instability and restricted choice.

The justification of the THL by dwellers was further evidenced by the fact that the restrictive nature of the THL only arose from further probing by the researcher while freedom was eagerly expressed. Four dwellers are attempting to sell their homes; two were dissatisfied with the burden of moving and two had parking issues. Yet, all sellers quickly conveyed their satisfaction with the THL as a whole, despite the need to abandon the lifestyle as the restrictions became too burdensome. There was no difference in expressed sacrifices or restrictions from selling and non-selling dwellers. Furthermore, dwellers downplayed required 'adjustments'. As Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser) noted, 'I wouldn't say sacrifices, I'd say adjustments' then went on to list the issues he has had with utilities and explained that he is trying to sell the home due to the burden of moving such a large structure. However, many restrictions and sacrifices required a substantial need to shift choices around housing. These dwellers have come to understand their freedom through normalising tactics that push for the notion that a responsible, active, and ethical individual should take responsibility over house, employment, and all aspects of life (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000, 2001; Flint, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003). Dwellers have been governed by technologies of responsabilisation (Flint, 2003) and the desire to not be deemed a burden on the state and thus problematised (Flint, 2004; Cruikshank, 1999). Therefore, for many dwellers, these 'adjustments' are acceptable within this pursuit of optimising the 'self', constructing their freedom within these many restrictions and sacrifices.

Several dweller accounts highlighted the contradictions or disparities between expressions of freedom and restrictions. For instance, Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser) defended the financial freedom that the lifestyle provides, because her mom had 'killed herself' to pay for a mortgage, even though she had faced several challenges and setbacks: how difficult the utilities have been, how she was kicked off the original land where she parked, and how she could not get the home insured and therefore gets very nervous around storms. Essentially, Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser), who explained she was seeking stability, articulated a great deal of instability in her THL experience. Perhaps, then, dwellers found freedom in the opportunity to have a choice around how they are being restricted. However, dwellers were eager to control

the way in which these restrictions around the THL are understood. As several were quick to explain away restrictions and sacrifice, while even those attempting to sell expressed satisfaction with their decision to adopt the THL. Essentially, stating that the lifestyle offers a great deal of freedom except the freedom to live where you would like and move about freely. The suggestion by many dwellers was that the THL was more satisfying than traditional housing due to the many freedoms it offers, despite the many restrictions, most of which would not exist in a traditional home. These dwellers are prioritising and attaching these notions of freedom to the financial security that this version of homeownership offers. Again, these sacrifices and restrictions are worth it to many of these dwellers as they are steered into taking responsibility over their housing and pursuing the superior choice of homeownership. Dwellers see themselves fundamentally as empowered and active citizens, thus in line with the pursuit of an optimal 'self', living outside of the 'fallacy' of traditional housing and the 'flaws' of the rental market (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Flint, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). This begs the question of whether these dwellers 'choose' the THL.

Fundamentally, this investigation allowed for a review of whether these expressions and the adoption of this lifestyle are the result of living outside of entrapping institutional constraints or a by-product of being subjectified. In so doing, the extent to which dwellers are 'choosing' this lifestyle has been reviewed. Indeed, in the name of freedom and choice, these individuals are taking responsibility for their housing in a neoliberal world that sees housing as a privilege not a right. The adoption of the THL for these dwellers sits within these governing practices that steer 'choice' around housing. Compromisers were 'constrained' into this adapted 'choice', while Detractors made this 'choice' to act against perceived 'constraints' imposed upon them by traditional institutions. Yet, the THL offered both types the opportunity to act against normalised versions of the American dream and traditional homeownership. Arguably, through 'choosing' to adopt the THL, dwellers decided to be active amidst oppressive modern neoliberal policymaking, as both were still driven by governing mechanisms that divide the active 'poor' from the inactive and promote being an empowered citizen (Cruikshank, 1999). These dwellers 'chose' to adopt the THL as it provided opportunity for some control over housing amongst the current state of traditional homeownership. Furthermore, this housing situation led to new considerations for these participants. Choices were made available, though restricted under neoliberal governance, that were otherwise not considered before: the opportunity to work less, live more simply, self-design and build one's house, or live with less space. This investigation of the tiny home dweller highlighted the ways governing practices

were ‘adapted, challenged and contested from below’ (McKee, 2011, p. 2). Expressions of freedom by these dwellers should be understood in the context of creating space for autonomy and choice amidst these governing restraints.

4.6 Conclusion

The American dream ethos, tripartite in nature, incorporating notions of freedom, individualism, self-determination, and material accumulation and wealth, has come to represent a perfect society of driven individuals, one that needs to be continuously pursued. Utilising the American dream ethos, underscored by the meritocracy myth, the neoliberal mentality of rule steers individuals, infiltrating every aspect of human life (Foucault, 1982, 1988, 1991). Responsibility is placed on the individual to chase a superior ‘self’ in order to maximise the population (Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Brown, 2003, 2015). Yet neoliberal policies have created an affordable housing crisis and overall economic instability. As argued, this creates a population ever-chasing stability in unstable times and thus constructing the notion of freedom within these restrictive parameters (Harvey, 2005). Individuals are steered into acting responsibly via strategies and practices meant to divide and establish norms (Foucault, 1982). Debt management systems rely on tactics used to compel self-governance via an omnipotent entity that monitors and establishes a record on each individual. This is the context from which the THL emerged. In this era of ever-increasing economic uncertainty, these dwellers sought housing stability. Yet dwellers expressed freedom and self-determination around the adoption and experience of the THL. Many came to construct their freedom and individuality around this lifestyle, suggesting that these neoliberal mechanisms used to shape and regulate how people understand and practice their freedom were, in part, successful (Rose, 1999a).

For the first time, this research identified two types of tiny house dwellers, which differed in their relationships to traditional housing. The Detractors, while critical of the traditional housing market and actively avoiding the mortgage trap, were also unaware of the ways in which they were made political subjects, seeking stability in uncertain economic times, suggesting instead that adoption of the THL is living beyond these restrictive systems, rather than ignited by them. The Compromisers, pursuing an adapted and ‘constricted’ version of the American dream, view homeownership provided by the THL as an opportunity to reach a more desirable and responsible stratum. This type used criticism of traditional housing to justify and

suggest a profundity in this lifestyle, while in fact, these suggestions imply the way neoliberal governance has steered these individuals into understanding choice and freedom. The adoption of the THL is largely the result of a neoliberal era devastated by an extreme socio-economic divide and collapse of the housing market, as well as the imposing governing mechanisms that direct democratic choice. At the same time, the opportunity to live ‘tiny’ did provide options to these dwellers that are not available within current traditional housing. Essentially, then, these neoliberal restrictions led to an adoption of this small-space living ‘choice’ that resulted in the re-evaluation of housing needs. The extent to which this will lead to long-term downsizing and thus an infiltration of neoliberal rationalities, especially considering the future home aspirations and life course trajectories of the Compromisers, is unknown. However, this chapter highlighted how the current affordable housing crisis has the potential to ignite more alternative housing scenarios out of necessity.

5. Becoming a ‘tiny houser’: neoliberal rationalities and identity formation around THL

5.1 Introduction

This chapter relies on Rose’s (1996a/b; 1999a/b; 2000) work on the ways in which individuals are self-governed to ‘make a project out of [their] own identities’ (1996a, p. 160) to investigate empirical findings and address RQ3: ‘*How do dwellers construct identity around the THL?*’ This is based on Foucault’s (1982, 1988) mode of self-subjectification, or practices of self-governance by which humans reproduce and transform themselves as the subject. As reviewed in prior chapters, governing practices look to steer the development of subjects’ identities through technologies of responsibility, morality, and autonomy (Flint, 2003; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Indeed, Foucault defined the art of governing individuals into subjects, or governmentality, as ‘the conduct of conduct’, highlighting the productive nature of power, thus opening the space for consideration of the ways in which subjects shape their own subjectivities (Foucault, 1982, 1991; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Moreover, the recent governmentality scholarship that utilises ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) methodological approaches to review the potentiality of an active and resistant subject is relied upon (for example Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). This chapter joins with this approach to explore identity construction revealed through ‘lay perspectives’ (dweller accounts) in order to engage with the notion that governable subjects can also act as ‘governors’ in the creation of their own identities (Flint, 2003; McKee, 2011, p. 2).

Fundamentally, this approach situates dwellers’ claims of and identification with becoming ‘tiny housers’, a term articulated by dwellers themselves. These accounts include the ways in which dwellers: (1) self-defined as ‘tiny housers’; (2) appropriated differentiation and normalisation tactics, or created and/or adopted divisions or binaries used to justify this lifestyle; and (3) expressed being or becoming ‘resisters’. These categorisations, generated from an analysis of dweller narratives, are supported by ethnographic observations. The two previously defined distinct types, Compromisers and Detractors, are used to further situate findings and expose variability in accounts when applicable. Therefore, these are relied upon as a mechanism to understand the ways in which identity formation occurred around the THL. As notions of freedom were constructed around governing practices that steer dwellers to take responsibility over their housing, this chapter presents the ways in which dweller identities have been (re)constructed and (re)produced within this process.

This chapter is structured as follows to develop the above approach. In section 5.2 governing practices are investigated around how dwellers (1) self-defined as ‘tiny housers’ and (2) appropriated differentiation and normalisation tactics, or created and/or adopted divisions or binaries used to justify this lifestyle, in order to expose the ways in which dwellers developed understandings of themselves. Resistance and the THL is reviewed in section 5.3, relying on empirical evidence that suggests identity formation around (3) being or becoming a tiny house ‘resister’. Section 5.4 concludes with a review of dweller subjectivities as is revealed through the exploration of the ‘messiness’, or ways in which governing practices do not always act as intended, in developing dweller identities.

5.2 Becoming a ‘tiny houser’

This section investigates dweller claims of becoming ‘tiny housers’ and other aspects related to (re)construction of individual rationalities and identities around the THL. The use of a quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) governmentalities approach allows for a review of the development of dweller subjectivities and thus identities through an ‘everyday’ exploration of power (Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). In this chapter the ways in which dwellers formed identities around the THL and valorised these identities through reconfiguring understandings of the ‘self’ and relating to others is highlighted. This analysis sits within Rose’s (1996a/b) notion of the ‘genealogies of the self’, which argues that individual construction of identity occurs around the ways in which subjectivities are either affirmed or denied through these processes. In section 5.2.1, dwellers’ self-definition as ‘tiny housers’ is reviewed in order to investigate how identities were articulated around the THL. This is inclusive of expressions of distinctions between types of ‘tiny housers’ and suggestions of becoming better versions of the ‘self’ due to this newfound identity. Following this, section 5.2.2 explores the valorisation and justification of these developed identities, considering how dwellers appropriated the tactic of ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982) via the creation and/or adoption of divisions or binaries that suggest the superiority of the THL.

5.2.1 Self-defining as a ‘tiny houser’

Practices of self-subjectification, or the process by which the subject (re)produces and transforms herself or himself as a subject, are evident in the ways in which dwellers self-defined around this lifestyle (Foucault, 1982, 1988). The majority of dwellers in this thesis self-defined as ‘tiny housers’, used verbiage to imply the THL as something they are or something they became (a better version of the ‘self’), and employed other similar terminology that suggests a construction of a ‘tiny houser’ identity. Dwellers also articulated distinctions between types of ‘tiny housers’ to clarify the version of ‘tiny houser’ they identified with. However, as argued in chapter 4, these reconstructed identities were developed within the process of taking responsibility over one’s housing, driven by financial motivations. While individuals self-form as subjects and ‘act upon themselves’, these acts are constrained by socio-cultural and historical knowledge networks that support the development of identities. The subject, then, comes to understand themselves accordingly (Foucault, 1988). Arguably, the ways in which these dwellers self-defined as ‘tiny housers’ or used such terminology imply that the THL has reconfigured their understanding of the ‘self’. However, this process of reconstructing identities is, in part, the result of neoliberal governing practices that individualise success and promote the continuous pursuit of the optimal ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

Seemingly, these newfound identities as ‘tiny housers’ are used as a way to take ownership over this housing ‘choice’ and join onto a lifestyle that is then claimed to be a better way of living (presented in section 5.2.2). This is suggested by the way some identified as pioneers in the THL as they lived ‘tiny’ before others did. For example, Debbie (early 50s, female, Detractor) stated, ‘I ‘went tiny’ before I even heard of going tiny’, while Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor), noted ‘I’ve been living tiny most of my life’, Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) articulated a deeper connection with being a ‘tiny houser’ as being something he always identified with despite living in traditional housing; ‘that was always something that really resonated with me...being a tiny houser’. Furthermore, Joshua’s (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) account was indicative of the way in which many dwellers spoke of the THL as being something active, or something they became in using language such as ‘my inspiration of ‘going tiny’...’, ‘in living small...’, while becoming a different version of the ‘self’ after adopting the THL was evident among dweller accounts. For instance, George (mid 60s, male, Detractor), explained his transition to veganism, not watching TV, and hiking:

‘I adopted this minimalistic lifestyle. I became a vegetarian then eventually a vegan...I used to watch TV, I owned many DVDs, but I haven’t watched TV in years, I mostly read, write, and hike.’

Susan (mid 60s, female, Detractor) noted how the THL has made her into an advocate for this cause, seemingly now part of her identity: ‘I’ve become a big tiny house advocate and supporter’. Alice (late 20s, female, Compromiser) implied that the THL has made her into this version of the ‘self’ that is both minimalist and ‘prepper’ (a person who actively prepares to be self-sufficient, often in cases of emergency or catastrophe):

‘Now I’m some kind of odd cross between a minimalist as far as some things and a prepper as far as other things’.

For a majority of dwellers, becoming a ‘tiny houser’, or shifting habits due to adopting the THL, was expressed to convey a superiority or betterment in this process and in what they have ‘become’. For instance, Will and Jo (mid 30s, male and female, Compromisers) indicated that ‘going tiny’ has resulted in ‘better’ habits, arguably as part of their project of optimising the ‘self’:

‘I started liking to bake, we make our own bread, we really try to stay close to nature, [Will] has a huge garden. He loves to garden, it has definitely forced us to become a lot more nature, organic, healthier, which is nice, so it’s changed a lot being in a tiny house.’

While, in fact, the opportunity to bake or grow food is available to those not living as ‘tiny housers’, Will and Jo established this distinction between these newfound superior habits of being more ‘nature, organic’ and how they lived before, thus suggesting a reconstruction of identity around being ‘tiny housers’, who live more responsibly in many aspects of life (i.e. cooking, gardening). The implication is that becoming people who make their own bread and grow their own food, which they have attached to ‘going tiny’, represents living a better life. Similarly, Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) implied that the THL has allowed him to live more in line with better values and pursue a better version of the ‘self’, stating:

‘Under the umbrella of being in the tiny house movement...I decided to stop working jobs that didn’t align with my values and that was really important to me...I felt it would be better to spend focus and energy on my permaculture dreams and projects.’

Indeed, Cameron’s transition to the THL included abandoning his corporate job and starting his own permaculture business.

At the same time, Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male, Detractors) noted that the THL was in agreement with how they identified themselves previously, stating:

‘The mentality: ‘don’t tread on me,’ have you heard that? We are Libertarians, that’s our philosophical framework and that’s why we are doing tiny houses. I love living tiny.’

Melissa and Jim suggested that the adoption of this lifestyle allowed for a reinforcement of existing identities. However, arguably, these claims are used as another mechanism to justify this lifestyle.

A few dwellers also made distinctions within the THL, comparing themselves to other ‘tiny housers’. For instance, as Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male, Detractors) own a tiny house community, Jim made an observation regarding his version of THL compared to others:

‘Someone like myself, who is extremely minimalist. I don’t need a lot of items to be happy. I’m utilitarian that way. I like beauty and aesthetics but functionality first, but then the other side of that is a hoarder.’

Essentially, Jim established a differentiation between himself (a minimalist and utilitarian who is happy with little) and others (hoarders), seemingly linking more positive attributes to the way in which he chooses to ‘be’ a ‘tiny houser’ compared to other ‘tiny housers’ that live in his community. Similarly, other accounts conveyed how dwellers have created divisions around different ‘types’ of ‘tiny housers’. Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) explained this when discussing his desire to have a more mobile home. He found the mobility that the THL offered to be restrictive and noted that he ‘couldn’t see himself as that kind of ‘tiny houser’ because he finds it too burdensome and fuel intensive to move the tiny home like some people do. Additionally, Jackie (early 50s, female, Detractor) wanted to differentiate between herself and other ‘tiny housers’:

‘I guess one of the things that I would say, I’m kinda on the older side of the spectrum of ‘tiny housers’. You kinda know what you have to have, I’m too set in my ways to do something that will make me completely uncomfortable so that was a big part of the planning that went into the tiny house.’

Here, she articulated a distinction between the ways in which she identifies as a ‘tiny houser’ and her definition of a ‘normal’ ‘tiny houser’. Jackie was firstly looking to acknowledge that

she recognises herself outside of the ‘normal’ ‘tiny houser’ due to her age (this assumption is not supported by the recruitment of this research). Further, Jackie, who has a walk-in-closet for clothing in her tiny house, was justifying both her adoption of this lifestyle at her age, as well as the fact she is not the type of ‘tiny houser’ that is willing to live ‘uncomfortably’ or in a minimal manner. In this, she was explaining her aversion to making compromises around having her ‘stuff’.

This self-identification as a ‘tiny houser’ is further supported by the fact that almost half of the dwellers have websites featuring advice around aspects of tiny living and photos of their process. A few are offering their expertise as a THL consultant for a price. One dweller charges USD \$75 to ‘talk tiny’ and share her experience of tiny living with potential future ‘tiny housers’, including a home tour. Clearly, ‘being’ ‘tiny housers’ is a central part of these dwellers’ lives, with a few self-identifying as experts in this area.

To summarise, a majority of dweller identities, or the ways in which they understand themselves and thus judge, consume, regulate, and exist in these spaces, have been redefined and reconstructed through the adoption of the THL. Articulations of being ‘tiny housers’ or other verbiage suggesting self-definition around the THL (i.e. minimalistic, organics, nature), revealed the ways in which identifying as being a part of the THL contributes to their ‘project of the self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). While identity formation, reproduction and the valorisation of these identities was evident, dwellers have redefined themselves around this alternative lifestyle, as all participated in traditional housing prior to adoption (either traditional homeownership or the rental market). This is in part the result of justifying the THL and self-containing the reality of being steered into a housing option for the purpose of seeking financial security. Individuals, however, are active in this process. Identity formation is not one directional but occurs co-constructively whereby subjects can challenge and contest amidst being steered by governing practice (McKee, 2011). This is recognised in dwellers’ affirmations of their identities through this process of establishing what type of ‘tiny houser’ they are as opposed to others. Indeed, identities are often formed and/or reinforced as a result of understanding the ‘self’ in relation to others (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Arguably, technologies of responsabilisation and autonomy are supported by dwellers’ reconfigured notions of the ‘self’, or the way in which they have shifted understanding of and aspirations for themselves and how they judge and regulate those outside of these self-

identities. The next section investigates how these identities are justified and valorised through the creation and/or adoption of norms and differentiations.

5.2.2 Appropriating differentiation and normalisation tactics

Modern neoliberal governing practices use normalising and dividing tactics, suggesting superior and aspirational ways of being, which are bound to knowledge by which individuals come to understand themselves and be understood (Foucault, 1982; Raco 2009, 2011). Foucault's mode of 'dividing practices' emphasises this process whereby tactics are used to divide the subject both within herself, and from other subjects according to a binary logic of norm and deviance (Foucault, 1982, p. 777-778). The result is the individual adopting identities that are reinforced by norms and shaped by knowledge attached to those identities (Foucault, 1982). For instance, homeownership has been promoted as the responsible housing choice, superior to renting, via governing practices that serve to normalise and problematise 'choices' outside of this norm. These norms create a division between the responsible homeowner and the more deviant behaviour of renting. The pursuit of homeownership is due to an internalisation of this established divide whereby individuals are driven by and come to understand themselves through their desire to pursue normalised acts of housing consumption (Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee et al., 2017). As argued in chapter 4, the promotion of traditional homeownership via normalising tactics influenced the adoption of the THL. Most THL adoptees expressed preferences for homeownership which is suggestive of aligning with hegemonic neoliberal discourses. The Compromisers adopted this lifestyle due to their inability to access traditional homeownership and an aversion to the renting market, viewed as irresponsible, wasteful and deviant by many dwellers. Detractors, able to access the market, were still driven firstly by the desire for financial security, and adopted this version of homeownership as it was viewed as a more stable housing option. Governing practices were therefore successful in driving dwellers to take responsibility over their housing in an unstable housing market through the normalisation of homeownership as the responsible and ethical option.

Dwellers appropriated this tactic of establishing differentiations/binaries in order to further suggest the betterment or superiority of the THL; or that living as a 'tiny houser' is living in opposition or 'beyond' the faults of traditional housing (section 5.2.2.1), and better than other small-space living options, such as RVs and mobile homes (5.2.2.2). Dwellers' need to

differentiate the THL in these ways is explored below. Arguably, this practice of dividing and/or differentiating has been appropriated by dwellers to further justify and affirm this lifestyle.

5.2.2.1 Differentiating traditional housing

Neoliberal technologies of governance used to normalise homeownership promote traditional housing as the responsible choice; thus choices in opposition to traditional housing are perceived as defiant and ‘flawed’ (Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee et al. 2017). However, empirical findings indicate a majority of dwellers appropriated this mode of differentiation to establish a new norm. Essentially, dwellers created oppositional binaries that claimed the superiority of the choice to adopt the THL and the deviance in traditional housing. Dwellers’ accounts suggest this division between a morally superior THL and the deviant traditional housing by changing the benchmark against which they are judging themselves and judging others. Therefore, seemingly, dwellers are appropriating this tactic to affirm their own subjectivities, or their identity as a responsible and aware homeowner, driven by a self-work project (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

These claims are supported by dwellers’ articulation of traditional housing and/or those living in traditional houses to be irresponsible, wasteful and excessive, implications of being uninformed, and historically unaware. For instance, Joshua (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) spoke of his experience in Ethiopia to compare the ways in which individuals lived in small huts in this impoverished country in the Global South:

‘I went to Ethiopia and saw rural communities in East Africa who live on less than \$2/day, live in essentially 'tiny houses'. Many families will live with 8 people in these tiny huts... Seeing how simply they lived was an inspiration for me to downsize my life... we can learn from the way people live all over the world. ’

This comparison suggests that his adoption of the THL is rooted in a greater global awareness, clearly a privileged Global North perspective, the implication being that those living in traditional houses are uninformed and inconsiderate of this understanding, thus claiming a moral superiority. Furthermore, a few dwellers made the comparison between the THL and the ways in which the US was founded by self-starters and pioneers who built their own homes, implying that this is a fault of traditional housing and suggesting a superiority in being an individual that goes back to these core values:

‘It’s a basic thing, this country was settled by pioneers who built all their shelter, you can’t do that anymore.’ (Ben, mid 30, male, Compromiser)

Many dwellers conveyed that the THL offers an opportunity to reclaim this ‘better’ way of being housed. These expressions could be used to support recent claims by Westhale (2015) that the THL is appropriating poverty, as dwellers have a choice to live small and simple as opposed to many who (i.e. in the Global South) do not. However, arguably, this is the result of self-governing practices, as dwellers are justifying this choice as more autonomous, rather than identifying it as the result of seeking stable housing in unstable times. Dwellers have (re)constructed their identities around being ‘more aware’ patrons of housing than traditional homeowners. They have altered the ways in which they understand and judge themselves and others as a result of becoming ‘tiny housers’, while being steered by technologies of governance that promote these very values they deem as superior (i.e. being self-reliant and a self-starter and/or pioneer).

Additionally, several dwellers described traditional housing as not allowing one to live one’s fullest life. Susan explained that traditional housing does not allow for a connection to the natural or social world, yet the THL counters this problematic trend:

‘I think we have a tendency in our houses particularly as they grow and get more screens in them, to be really inward turning and not connected to the outside whether it’s the natural world or the social world. I’ve found that living in the tiny house increases my connection in both ways.’ Susan (mid 60s, female, Detractor)

Niko (late 20s, male, Compromiser) stated how he and his wife want to experience life more and the THL offers them this:

‘We want to experience life and get out there and live it and not sit inside a home that you are going to be spending [money] on for the next 30 years of your life and you don’t even know half the shit you got in there, you just accumulate things over the course of your life and it’s just useless.’

These accounts suggest that living in a small space pushes individuals outside, superior in its ability to allow individuals to live a more fulfilled life, implying that traditional housing does not allow for these fulfilling experiences to the same extent or at all. Indeed, the minimal scholarship around tiny house experiences, specifically Anson (2014, 2017), reinforces the point that the THL forces a person outdoors more. Hunt (2016) also found this to be the case for huts and bothies in Scotland: small and simple structures used for short-stay living. While

notable, this idea of ‘superiority’ should be understood in relation to the several restrictions that dwellers expressed around spatial aspects of the home (presented in section 4.4.2). In addition, empirical findings highlight Rose’s (1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000) work on how governing mechanisms drive the individual to desire to be the best version of the ‘self’ and continuously pursue fulfilment. Therefore, this need to differentiate and claim a deviance in traditional housing exposes how dwellers see themselves and others and how they justify this decision to adopt the THL. For instance, Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser) eagerly explained how ridiculous traditional houses are:

‘Yeah, certain amenities like dishwashers and things seem ridiculous to me now and I mean why use electricity if you could just wash it. Also the different rooms, like you don’t need a family room and a living room, and a den. It’s such a waste of space. I feel like if I ever lived in a normal house again I would be like, “oh my god, this is ridiculous.”’

This creation of a divide between those inside and those outside the THL is epitomised by the following ethnographic observation at the Orlando Tiny Home and RV park of a woman driven to adopt the THL after her husband passed away:

Field diary entry, 11th of November 2016

Going for a walk through the community, interspersed with old, shabby looking RVs and new, colourful tiny houses, I encountered the owner of the bright yellow tiny house out with her dog. I stopped to have an informal chat to get her opinion of living in the community. Her pride in her home was apparent, as she invited me in to show me her well-designed layout, the space saving features, and ways in which she saves energy and lives minimally. She explained to me that her husband had passed away a year or so prior. She decided to retire and sell her home in order to move to Florida and have a less stressful life. Going on, she stated how much more content she is with this simpler way of life. Further, explaining the absurdity of the size of her old house while she can’t believe people find contentment in that sort of lifestyle. Making bold statements about traditional housing being that she only abandoned it one year ago in order to find a more stable and less stressful life after the death of her husband.

Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor) highlighted the superiority of the THL as she no longer has to clean or do maintenance work on her home, while ‘the majority of people’ in traditionally large homes spend a lot of time doing this:

‘The majority of people spend their time working at least 40 hours a week, maybe more, and end up spending another chunk of their time doing household chores. I don't spend any time doing household chores.’

Essentially, in order to justify this lifestyle, these neoliberal capitalist notions of the superior ‘self’ and pursuit of fulfilment and happiness are adopted and internalised by dwellers. Identity construction is evident in these proclamations of living against and superior to more traditional norms. Linking these empirical accounts, whereby the subject is divided within herself and from other subjects according to a binary of norm and deviance (Foucault, 1982), dwellers adopted this practice in order to justify the choice to pursue the THL. As the THL is a housing option outside traditional norms, it has the potential to be linked to irresponsible or deviant behaviour. Therefore, dwellers shifted these benchmarks and instead were eager to imply a deviance and irresponsibility around traditional housing. However, as most dwellers adopted the THL due to a desire for a version of a normalised homeownership and financial security, this need to differentiate from traditional homeownership and suggest superiority in this new type of homeownership indicates a reconstruction of identities. Indeed, as reviewed in chapter 4, rather than feeling forced or constrained around this lifestyle, dwellers expressed freedom in living in this manner. Notably, these expressions of the ‘faults’ of traditional housing were directed at blaming traditional homeowners for being unaware and wasteful rather than the neoliberal policies that have created unaffordable and unstable housing options. At the same time, dwellers’ articulation of the differentiation between the THL and other more stigmatised small-living housing opportunities implies further appropriation of these tactics and this is reviewed in the next section.

5.2.2.2 Differentiating RVs/mobile homes

Almost half of dwellers sought to establish a divide between the THL and other small-space, non-traditional housing options, such as recreational vehicles (RV) and mobile homes, noting a superiority in a tiny home being a more of a ‘real house’. Without prompting, many dwellers made this differentiation. While these claims were not explicitly suggesting a deviance associated with RVs/mobile homes, many were quick to critique the ‘feel’ of these dwellings as ‘less home-like’ compared to tiny homes. Several dwellers emphasised the fact that tiny homes are more of a house/home than RVs:

[This is] ‘a space that is a lot more friendly, comfortable, inviting than an RV, it feels like a house, it doesn't feel like an RV.’ (Silvia and Chris, late 40s, female and male, Detractors)

‘We wanted it to be a comfortable home not a mobile home...I couldn't imagine living in an RV permanently. They never feel like a home space. They always feel like a metal box.’ (Will and Jo, mid 30s, male and female, Compromisers)

‘You know those aren't meant to last like normal houses, when we build our [tiny] house we expect it to last 100 years because they are built like normal houses...the recreational vehicles are plastics, they don't last long.’ (Melissa and Jim, late 40s, female and male, Detractors)

Overall, there was an eagerness to make this distinction from other small-space living options, ones that have been historically stigmatised in the US (Kusenbach, 2009). These descriptions of RVs as ‘plastics’ and that they ‘feel like a metal box’ are made in order to highlight the comfort in a tiny home compared with RVs.

The following photos provide visual insight into these dweller statements. Figure 5.1 juxtaposes a tiny house with the more stigmatised RV at the Orlando Lakefront Tiny House Community, which allows both RVs and tiny houses. One can observe that these small-living options are similar in size yet the tiny home appears to be a tiny version of a traditional American home (even featuring a porch), while the RV clearly has its own unique aesthetic identified as less ‘homey’ by these dwellers.



Figure 5.1 Tiny house and RV juxtaposition (Author's photo)

Figure 5.2 highlights the more ‘home-like’ and less plastic features of many tiny houses, photographed while viewing several tiny house models at the Tiny House Jamboree (i.e. wooden features, granite counter-tops, handcrafted design). However, as explained around the restrictive nature of mobility (section 4.4.3), these materials make the home very heavy and less mobile (without the assistance of a large truck). Yet, many dwellers found freedom in the idea of mobility and being able to relocate the home if needed. Clearly, however, many prioritised having a space that felt and looked more like a traditional home.



Figure 5.2 Tiny house interiors (Author's photo)

These accounts are rooted in claims about what makes a home and how a home should look. Therefore, an exploration of the commodification of these tiny homes is necessary, as this arguably acts as a means to govern the pursuit of housing (Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; Gurney, 1999). Seemingly, then, the appealing aestheticism that the THL offers allows for dwellers to view this housing option as acceptable, as it can be differentiated from less desirable small-living choices. Due to this suggestion, empirical evidence is reviewed through the use of technologies of individuality and aestheticism. The ways in which the THL has been commodified, and at times Disneyfied, a notion popularised by Bryman (2004) to explain the prevalence in American culture to make commodities cute and homogenised, supports this expressed division of the THL from more stigmatised forms of small-space living. Arguably, some tiny homes offer a ‘tiny’ version of the hyper-commodified ‘McMansion’ prevalent in housing choices in the United States and embedded in the contemporary American dream. These ‘McMansions’ promote a certain aestheticism rooted in a luxury and a branding to suggest the aspirational version of homeownership (Nasar et al., 2007; Ritzer, 2001). Some dwellers’ statements around the need to have an aesthetically beautiful exterior and field notes that witnessed the Disneyfication and commodification of these tiny homes support this argument. For example, Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser) noted a common sentiment among THL dwellers:

‘When I was designing it, someone told me, the cuter your house is, the easier time you’ll have to find a place to park it. So that’s why I put a lot of work to the exterior.’

The following ethnographic observation of the Orlando Lakefront Tiny House Community, appropriately located only a few miles from Disney World, exemplified the ways in which these homes are being Disneyfied/commodified and intentionally differentiated from other small-living options:

Field diary entry, 8th of November 2016

As I pulled up to my pale blue tiny home that I would be staying in for the week, I witnessed some people taking pictures and chatting with the tiny homeowner next door. After a few minutes, they jumped back in their car and drove away. It seemed I had witnessed the tiny house fandom first hand. As one dweller at the community noted, ‘people come up and look in the windows, knock on the door’. It is quite fitting, especially here in Disney country (Orlando, FL), that these homes are seen as some sort of attraction. That being said, as the community owner conveyed, the ‘cute

and palatable' aesthetic, especially the bright colours, are intentional. He wants to be sure to differentiate them from the many rundown RVs that sit nearby.

Figure 5.3 shows the pale blue tiny house that the researcher stayed in while conducting fieldwork in the community. The community featured bright, vibrant, and unique homes, including yellow (see figure 5.1), purple, white with yellow trim, and white with red trim.



Figure 5.3 Researcher's Airbnb tiny house (Author's photo)

Further, the following entry from ethnographic observations at the Annual Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado Springs, CO highlights the ways in which this lifestyle caters to consumer culture through making these homes visually appealing and offering a variety of choice and individuality. A plethora of styles, sizes, and levels of artisanship were present for consideration by the many different types of potential tiny home consumer:

Field diary entry, 5th of August 2016

Looking around the field, various styles of dwellings, from red clay adobe to log cabin style, were present in the more than 50 homes on ground for viewing. Homes represented every aesthetic but had one thing in common: all were beautifully crafted, offering something desirable for all tastes. Attendees waited in long queues to take a look inside these spaces. I waited in several to witness state-of-the-art interiors with the latest appliances, woodwork, and installations. It was clear, these dozens of tiny homebuilders showing their homes in the hopes of selling these or similar models, were catering to this specific group of individuals who wanted a beautifully crafted yet tiny home.

Figure 5.4 presents just a few of the tiny home models on display at the Tiny House Jamboree, showing various aesthetic options, including a home resembling the traditional Mesoamerican adobe-style, now common in the Southwestern United States (far right).



Figure 5.4 An array of tiny houses to view (Author's photo)

The commodification of the THL, then, can be seen in dwellers' desire to make clear divisions between this lifestyle and other stigmatised, less aesthetically pleasing small-space living situations. An appeasement of the American dream occurred through this process of commodifying these tiny dwellings, allowing dwellers to reconstruct their identities in line with their understanding of a superior 'self'. While other (more stigmatised) small-living options were deemed as not in support of this pursuit, these dwellers redefined the THL as a superior way of being, thus further supporting their continued pursuit of optimising the 'self'.

These dwellers were subjectified through technologies of individuality and aestheticism and this is empirically supported. The THL reveals understandings of the consumer subject and governance technologies. Similar to the ways in which Flint (2003) argues that social housing is a site to explore identities around housing consumption whereby active consumers of housing are created under neoliberal rationalities. Therefore, the THL can be viewed as a 'site' telling of how these governance technologies are internalised and create subjects that in

turn understand themselves and re(construct) their identities around how they consume housing. At the same time, a divide within the THL seemingly exists, whereby some resist the commodification of the THL, and this highlights the complexities of subject formation around such a 'site'. Some dwellers identify the commodification of these homes as being in conflict with the lifestyle they signed onto, one of minimalism and resisting consumer culture. This point of contestation was exposed in the following ethnographic observation from the Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado Springs, CO:

Field diary entry, 6th of August 2016

My three days of tiny house 'jamboreeing' included an array of activities: many tours of state-of-the-art tiny houses presented mostly by builders looking to sell their products, participating in workshops giving hands-on advice (energy sourcing, permaculture, DIY home building, tips for off-grid living, minimalism, and spatial relations), as well as listening to several talks on a range of information. Talks largely focused on personal experiences with building one's own home and advice for building and living small, for example, 'Building for Less, with Less' and 'Family Style Minimalism'. Macy Miller, one of the pioneers of the THL, adamant about self-building, gave a talk sparking a debate between building one's own house vs purchasing these elaborate, commodified homes from these recently established tiny house building companies. This debate, which garnered a great deal of audience participation on both sides, highlights the complexities of such a lifestyle. It was clear many faithful 'tiny housers' seemingly felt that this conflicted with how they see the THL and who they are as 'tiny housers', being vocal in conveying that this lifestyle represents something beyond the commodification of housing that exists so rampantly within traditional ways of being housed.

Figure 5.5 presents the schedule of events at the jamboree, highlighting the array of conversations around the THL.

| | |
|--|---|
| <u>WORKSHOPS FRIDAY</u> | |
| 10 AM Downsize by Design Tiny House Teacher | 11 AM Tiny Alternatives Andrew & Julie Puckett |
| 3 PM Vertical Gardening Freedom to Thrive | 12 PM Leading an Ordinary Life from an Extraordinary Space The Office Hobo |
| 3:30 PM Hybridized Energy Production Unforgettable Fire & Backwoods Solar | 1:45 PM An Unexpected Education Dee Williams |
| 4:30 PM Permaculture Becky Elder | 3 PM A Healthy Home Sean David Burke |
| <u>SPEAKERS SATURDAY</u> | 3:30 PM Tiny House Trailer Giveaway (enter to win at Trailer Made Trailers) |
| 9 AM Protect your Investment Martin Burlingame | 3:45 PM Tiny House International Frieda Bakker |
| 9:45 AM Top Ten Tiny House Building Mistakes Andrew Morrison | 4:30 PM The Emerging Tiny House Industry Steve Weismann |
| 11 AM Coding and Zoning Darin Zaruba | 5 PM Tiny Think Tank, T.H.I.A. Panel |
| 11:45 AM Positive Energy in a Tiny Space Trevor Gay | <u>WORKSHOPS SUNDAY</u> |
| 1 PM Using Color to Create the Space You Imagine Erika Woelfel | 10 AM Practical Solar Small Spaces CLE |
| 2 PM Building for Less, with Less Deek Diedricksen | 11 AM 3D Printing for Tiny 3D - PT |
| 3 PM Family Style Minimalism Kim Kasl | 11:30 AM Spatial Relations Tiny House Collaborative |
| 3:45 PM Following Your Dreams & Designing a Life you Love Jewel Pearson | 3 PM Tiny House Podcast Perry Gruber, Michelle Boyle, & Mark Grimes |
| | 4 PM Tips for Off Grid Living Ariel McGlothlin |

Figure 5.5 Tiny house jamboree schedule (Author's photo)

Clearly, the governing practices involved in subjectification processes and identity formation around the THL are 'messy' and not clear-cut. Clarke (2007) highlights that this is how governing often happens, as subjects intended to be produced are not always produced. This ethnographic governmentalities approach made visible the many points of contestation and the 'messiness' of governing practices involved in steering housing choices and how dwellers then came to understand themselves (Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). The interplay of technologies of consumption and responsabilisation is apparent in the ways participants differentiated between themselves and other 'tiny housers' as well as from those living in other small living options. This is evidenced by the need to have an aesthetically pleasing home that can be easily differentiated from a more stigmatised RV, as well as the dweller self-identifying as a critic of the excessive and wasteful consumptive nature of traditional housing, all amidst taking responsibility over housing in uncertain economic times. As argued by Miller and Rose (2008), 'consumption technologies...establish the habits of conduct which might enable one to live a life that is

personally pleasurable and socially acceptable. These offer new ethics and techniques of living that do not set self-gratification and civility in opposition' (p. 141). Therefore, identities are understood in this context whereby the THL has allowed some dwellers to achieve homeownership and/or financial security through an aesthetically pleasing thus socially palatable commodity. At the same time, other dwellers identified this commodification of the THL as an irresponsible way to 'consume' the housing option. Overwhelmingly, dwellers stated and identified with living outside of traditional institutions, thus suggesting being or becoming 'resisters', therefore, resistance within the THL is reviewed next.

5.3 Resistance and the THL

This section presents an investigation of dwellers' identification with being or becoming 'resisters' as a result of the THL, or the ways in which a majority of dwellers have created identities around aspects related to living outside of or defiant to traditional institutions. The empirical evidence relied upon to conduct this investigation incorporates the above-presented empirical review of expressions of living in a way outside of the 'faults' and 'constraints' of traditional housing, through the establishment of binaries. Dwellers identified the THL as defiant to traditional housing thus suggesting themselves as 'resisters' through the appropriation of normalising and differentiating tactics, implying traditional housing is something to resist in order to live in a morally superior manner. Additionally, empirical evidence presented in chapter 4 is positioned within these claims, as this highlights the ways in which dwellers identified themselves as living beyond and/or 'free' from traditional housing and debt institutions. This is justified because resistance happens when new subjectivities are created, identities are reconstituted, and limits of freedom are engaged with and pushed (McNay, 1994). Therefore, this is an opportunity to explore 'struggles against the forms of subjection – against the submission of subjectivity' by dwellers (Foucault, 1982, p. 782). The THL 'resister' is positioned within the co-constructive nature of dwellers being both governed and acting as governors, as 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

While the ways in which dwellers have been governed around the THL has been explored thus far in this thesis, this section reviews how dwellers act against the 'traditional' ways of being governed. As argued in chapter 4, dweller accounts should be understood in the context of

creating space for autonomy. This investigation has the potential to expose how dwellers ‘adapted, challenged and contested from below’ (McKee, 2011, p. 2). Dwellers adopted this alternative lifestyle rather than succumbing to norms in other ways (i.e. for Detractors, remaining in traditional housing institutions despite financial hardship; and for Compromisers, remaining in the rental sector, restricting finances and saving in order to eventually sign onto traditional debt and pursue traditional homeownership). Indeed, this avoidance of traditional housing institutions by dwellers does contest governing practices that suggest a continuous ‘project of the self’ that includes the big house via mortgage reliance. Arguably, this implies that dwellers were active in rejecting norms that imply the aspirational way to be includes traditional housing trajectories and material accumulation (Flint, 2003; McKee, 2011), although dwellers still aspired to a version of homeownership, while many have other aspirations around housing in the future. Therefore, active resistance sits within the ‘messiness’ of these governing practices that have steered the adoption of and identity construction around the THL.

This section reviews resistance around each type, Detractors and Compromisers, respectively. Interestingly, there was no observed difference between type around identifying as ‘resisters’. However, the distinction between each type’s relationship to traditional housing is arguably revealing of the extent to which and in what ways dwellers are dissenting.

5.3.1 Detractors as resisters

Detractors, capable of joining traditional institutions, either decided against doing so, or abandoned this lifestyle. Therefore, at face value, their very act of THL adoption could be considered resistant to neoliberal governing mechanisms. As opposed to Compromisers, Detractors are not outright ‘constrained’ into this lifestyle, but, according to them, are acting against constricting institutions. However, most Detractors were firstly seeking financial stability. Arguably, then, the oppressive neoliberal institutions that created economic uncertainties and a housing crisis drove these motivations for adoption. However, via their adoption of the THL, Detractors are criticising the normalisation of large homes and debt institutions that fund the traditional housing trajectory, identified as less financially stable by dwellers; a stance which is reinforced by dweller accounts. The adoption of the THL by these Detractors resulted in an avoidance of debt entrapment and the normalisation of large homes, whether this was their primary motivation or not. As most Detractors are not looking to ‘get

on their feet' and expressed remaining in this housing option in the future more often than not, arguably these dwellers are, indeed, contesting these traditional institutions. Furthermore, Detractors, like Compromisers, also implied that they no longer aspire to a large home if they do indeed choose to leave the THL in the future, thus rejecting the normalised large house aspirations. For Detractors, resistance sits within this tension of criticising burdensome and constricting institutions and being steered into taking responsibility over their housing in this way to pursue financial security. As, indeed, acts of resistance arise out of restrictive institutions and resistance is not a total rejection of government, but instead it is about not accepting being governed in this manner, by these people, or for this purpose (Foucault, 1978). At the same time, Detractors articulated acting outside of these institutions through the adoption of the THL. This raises the question of how Detractors view themselves as dissenters and have developed subjectivities accordingly, as they still succumbed to normalising tactics around owning one's home in this way; which offered an aesthetically acceptable version of homeownership.

Detractors self-identified as 'resisters' through claims of the THL acting against unfair housing and mortgage reliance that results in the need to work excessively, and being discontented with wasteful consumption. As exemplified by Cameron's (early 40s, male, Detractor) suggestion that individuals are 'going tiny' as an act of defiance against this unsatisfying way of living:

'That is why people are going to this lifestyle because that [traditional work and house] does not work for a lot of us anymore more. I'm 41 and I've done that for a while.'

Similarly, Jackie (early 50s, female, Detractor) spoke of embedded norms that the THL acts against:

'Society says that when you make it and you are successful and it looks like this, the big house and the cars.'

Detractors self-defined around the THL and created binaries to highlight what this lifestyle is acting against by appropriating tactics of differentiation and normalisation. These developed binaries suggested that traditional housing and other aspects of normalised success are irresponsible and deviant. Detractors were active in developing these reconstructed identities around the THL within this process of justification. Essentially, for these dwellers, resistance sits within this appropriation of a mode of objectification used by neoliberal governing forces. Resistance occurred at this site of subjectivity by not accepting being governed in this way or deciding to no longer live under an entrapping mortgage and/or to obtain homeownership

outside of traditional debt systems. While Detractors were imposed upon to take responsibility over their house, they were active in deciding how they would do this, and in turn created new norms around this process. Therefore, dwellers' decision to adopt the THL is both an act of rejecting and accepting being imposed upon by strategies of control.

Detractors were active in this process of choosing how to pursue housing, yet still aspired to the normalised tenure of choice and, arguably, for these Detractors to be truly dissenting from these governing mechanisms, as is suggested by developed binaries, an acknowledgement of the processes that created the THL and the ways in which these institutions continue to control, is important. As unknowingly being made a political subject continues to reinforce this oppressive agenda (Rose, 1999a). However, there was no acknowledgement that the THL is the result of these unjust institutions which continue to determine and define this choice. Instead, the THL represented abandonment from these deviant institutions for Detractors. The adoption of this lifestyle was not directly an act of protest against a system or a lifestyle movement meant to contribute to a greater social good. These dwellers were firstly striving for a more financially viable and stable housing options for themselves. Therefore, although these Detractors appear to be dissenting, for many, these actions are the result of unjust neoliberal policies that have created an unstable housing crisis. While these participants are financially able to access the market, their expressions around the desire for more financial stability suggest feelings of insecurity around current housing trends and employment possibilities. Yet, resistance is arguably situated in the way the THL challenges understandings around the normalised traditional house and debt encumbrance. Furthermore, resistance sits within these dwellers' willingness to make sacrifices around house in order to live free from a crippling mortgage, excessive work life or entrapping debt, and reconstruct identities within this process. However, unacknowledged self-governing mechanisms have steered these Detractors into understanding their restricted acts of resistance as outright dissent.

Notably, Detractors have developed themselves and their lifestyles around living in and abandoning, or choosing to actively avoid, traditional housing and debt institutions, and this defines their relationship with the THL. In contrast, Compromisers have yet to experience or have access to traditional housing, therefore relate to the THL in a different way and for a different purpose; this directly impacts upon claims of resistance.

5.3.2 Compromisers as resisters

Compromisers articulated dissatisfaction with or desire to avoid the traditional housing market and mortgage system, many acknowledging the normalisation of large homes, car culture, and excessive consumption. As argued above, the THL inherently acts against the normalisation of large houses and traditional debt institutions. However, claims of being or becoming ‘resisters’ by Compromisers should be understood amidst the finding that these dwellers have been ‘constrained’ into the THL and are using it to save for the future in order to pursue other (undetermined) aspirations. Indeed, the THL was an adapted aspiration for these dwellers, who, empirical evidence suggests, will abandon this lifestyle as life progresses. Further, the need to adopt the THL highlights the compromises and disruptions that occurred around life course and housing career ‘choices’, as these individuals have family and housing aspirations beyond the THL; having to adjust these to accommodate financial uncertainties. Yet, similar to Detractors, Compromisers explained that they no longer desire the large house attached to the more traditional American dream. Furthermore, while resistance does sit within this site of subjectivity for Detractors, arguably, Compromisers should be explored with the understanding that they cannot access this traditional housing market that they claim to be acting in defiance of.

Ben (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) suggested that the THL is acting against a normative ‘model’:

‘I was looking to free myself from the traditional route of paying for housing - a certain model that is set in the culture.’

While several others spoke of the faults of society in driving irresponsible desire around a big house and more ‘things’:

‘You know society somehow, we have all these things that aren't really necessities anymore because it's easy... society tells us we should have a bigger house and we should have more things.’ (Will and Jo, 30s, male and female, Compromisers)

Joshua (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) further articulated this sentiment through his critique of the normalised car culture in the United States and how this contributes to consumption of large houses and excessive goods, implying that THL acts against these irresponsible tendencies:

‘We live in a country that was built to be a car country over the last 70 years, because this culture exists, tiny houses don't really go with the car culture, cars were built to go

to and from big houses, and cars are built to haul big things home from the big box store to big houses.'

The implication of these sorts of statements is that the THL acts against these societal 'issues.' Notably, Compromisers constructed identity around the THL similarly to Detractors, through self-defining and developing binaries to judge themselves and others in order to justify this lifestyle. Compromisers also succumbed to normalising tactics that divide and suggest an optimal version of the 'self', as this type is saving for the future to pursue an (undetermined) version of the American dream. Further, their aversion to renting is indicative of being governed in this way. Yet the co-constructive nature of dweller subjectification is evident in this investigation. Despite being steered to understand the rental market as inferior and pursue this 'tiny' version of homeownership, dwellers also explained the unaffordability and burden of renting. Therefore, Compromisers as 'resisters' should be understood at this point of contestation, whereby dwellers were acting against a burdensome housing market (renting). These dwellers 'got around' these traditional institutions then appropriated differentiation tactics to justify this newfound housing trajectory. Further, Compromisers as 'resisters' can be understood amidst a rejection of the traditional path of excessive work and forced debt to eventually realise future dreams. These dwellers took control of this 'choice' through constructing identities as 'tiny housers', while setting themselves up for the future and accessing homeownership now. Therefore, resistance can be found in the willingness to compromise and adapt in this innovative way. However, similarly to Detractors, the power of the neoliberal mentality of rule exists in that these dwellers do not recognise acting under the stronghold of neoliberal rationalities, or that the THL is a direct result of these societal 'issues' therefore it does not exist beyond them. Finally, these dwellers are unable to access traditional homeownership, by their own description, and this brings into question their identification as 'resisters', as Compromisers have not yet established themselves or their identities amidst their housing aspirations. These claims of dissenting from institutions unavailable and not (yet) entered seemingly falls more in line with being governed, rather than acting as governor. Arguably, dwellers are acting as the principle of their own subjection, as they have been governed into understanding their adoption of this lifestyle as outside of the many identified 'issues' with society. It could be assumed that the THL is merely 'producing' self-reliant and active citizens now who will join more traditional institutions that support capitalistic tendencies in the future. However, relying on a Foucauldian understanding of power, the tension between the 'produced' and 'productive' subject has the potential to ignite resistance

to normative tendencies, and thus alter future housing and life course trajectories; while it is premature to make claims if and when this disruption might take place for this younger cohort, the possibility exists.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed how dwellers constructed identities amidst becoming members of the THL. Dwellers were found to have acted as both governor and governed in creating and reproducing identities (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 2007). Indeed, dwellers came to understand themselves according to a dynamic interrelationship of modern power relations whereby normalising tactics and suggestions of pursuing a superior ‘self’ have shaped subjectivities (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). At the same time, dwellers created their own norms, used to reaffirm these newfound identities. Empirical findings indicated that dwellers self-defined around this lifestyle and created oppositional binaries that claim the superiority of the choice to adopt the THL, articulating a deviance in traditional housing. Additionally, several points of contestation were revealed. Specifically, dwellers created distinctions between themselves and other ‘tiny housers’, and while some contested the commodification of these homes, others supported this through their engagement with differentiating between these ‘cute’ tiny houses and other more stigmatised small-living options. This empirical evidence implied that dwellers were active in coming to understand themselves through these new lenses.

Essentially, due to a desire for stable housing in unstable times, these dwellers altered their identities. The need to create these binaries was the result of internalising these new self-definitions. This chapter highlighted how governable subjects can be active in these processes, further revealing the opportunity for exposing these instances of resistance in and around the THL when looking at this ‘everyday’ level, reviewing the voices of those being governed (McKee, 2011).

Notably, expressions of the ‘faults’ of traditional housing were directed at blaming traditional homeowners for being unaware and wasteful, rather than the neoliberal policies that have created unaffordable and unstable housing options. Therefore, an understanding of the governing mechanisms used to oppressively restrict housing opportunities was lacking. Seemingly, then, for Compromisers identity was largely constructed at the intersection of the desire to follow the norm of homeownership and save for the future and the need to justify the adoption of a non-traditional lifestyle in order to achieve this. Detractors also succumbed

to this practice as they sought financial stability through this version of homeownership. For both groups, the need to divide and justify this lifestyle was evident. Essentially, dwellers were claiming superiority in living on the 'right' and 'responsible' side of this division. This divide was used to further establish and valorise these identities and this lifestyle. Detractors and Compromisers identified themselves as 'resisters' by suggesting that through the THL they are resisting burdensome and irresponsible traditional institutions (i.e., large homes, entrapping debt, excessive consumption). An investigation of resistance revealed how these claims varied based on dweller type. All dwellers, to some extent, were active in deciding how they were steered around housing by choosing this alternative housing option rather than continuing with traditional choices. However, Detractors were critiquing institutions in which they have taken part, or intentionally avoided; thus active resistance can be witnessed in this type, as they 'chose' to dissent from these institutions and adopt the THL. In contrast, Compromisers has adapted their life courses due to a 'constraining' housing and economic situation. For the Compromisers, resistance can be identified in how this cohort made compromises and adapted their aspirations in this innovative way, to take ownership over their housing career by providing themselves with an opportunity to 'get on their feet'. However, these claims must be situated amidst the understanding that this is not an outright active 'choice' of dissent for these Compromisers. Both types then altered their 'self-work project' and identities to align with this 'choice'. While all dwellers were active in this process, this lifestyle was adopted under neoliberal policies that, in part, use techniques around traditional housing to steer understandings of the 'self', and resistance should be understood at this point of tension.

6. Neoliberal governmentalities and consumptive-conduct in the THL

6.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates consumption in the postmodern era to address RQ4: ‘*What are the patterns of consumption around the THL?*’. According to Miller and Rose (1997) ‘many diagnoses of our ‘postmodern condition’ hinge upon debates about consumption’ (p. 1). The goal is to uncover actualities of consumption and the development of dweller consumer subjectivities. Consumption is inseparable from the ‘project of the self’, whereby consumptive choices are attached to and governed through suggestions of creating and optimising the ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b; Flint, 2003; Kleine et al., 1995; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Indeed, consumption acts as ‘an enterprise activity’ in which the subject produces him or herself, used as a mechanism to position the ‘self’ in society (Foucault, 2008, p. 226; Rose, 1996a/b; Flint, 2003). Following the previous empirical chapters, Rose’s (2000) ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ is relied upon as a lens through which to situate the production of active, ethical, enterprising, empowered and responsible consumers. This review relies on an understanding of the normalising tactics that promote optimal and aspirational ways to consume and of suggestions of defiant consumer tendencies attached to the recent ‘ethical-turn’ and moralisation of consumptive choices (Lewis and Potter, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Binkley and Littler, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005; Raco, 2009, 2011) as modern liberal democracies look to shift the responsibility of consumptive risks and uncertainties from the state to the individual (Binkley, 2006).

This empirical exploration investigates consumptive dynamics of the ‘everyday’ in order to expose the power relations, practices and processes by which the dweller is subjectified. This chapter joins with an ethnographies of neoliberal governmentalities methodological approach, as used in prior chapters (for example Brady, 2014; McKee, 2011, 2016). This allows for consideration beyond a ‘productivist bias’ (Binkley, 2006, p. 346), as it cannot be assumed that patterns of consumption are the result of a non-reflexive and inactive consumer (Brady, 2014; Clarke, 2007). The intent is to expose how governing practices have shaped consumer ‘choices’ around the THL, as this aids in furthering understanding of the actualities of active and resistant dwellers (Brady, 2014, p. 13; McKee, 2016).

This chapter is structured as follows. In section 6.2, empirical data are presented in order to explore shifts in patterns of consumption and situate dwellers’ claims of morally superior

consumptive choices. Following this, in section 6.3, empirical findings that highlight tensions and contradictions around claims of ethical consumption are investigated. Section 6.4 concludes with a review of the development of consumer subjectivities around the THL.

6.2 Patterns of consumption

This section presents empirical data that expose patterns of consumption in order to investigate the mechanisms and processes involved in creating and shaping the dweller as a consumer subject. Dweller suggestions of being ‘empowered’, ‘informed’, ‘morally superior’, ‘responsible’, ‘enterprising’, ‘autonomous’, as well as ‘restrictive’, ‘resisting’, ‘sacrificing’ and other terminology indicative of an ethical, active, or self-determinant consumer subject are investigated. A majority of dwellers expressed such notions. Empirical data are situated within scholarship on lifestyle choices that, similarly to the THL, suggests an outcome of reduced consumption and/or living outside of traditional forms of consumption (i.e. ‘voluntary simplification’, ‘anti-consumption’, ‘downshifting’, ‘ethical consumption’, and ‘minimalism’). This is justified as the minimalist and anti-consumption movements in the United States have gained momentum amidst the contemporary economic downturn, the same context from which the THL gained popularity (Rodriguez, 2017). Furthermore, problematic tendencies highlighted around these lifestyle choices, specifically accusing them of being another ‘mode of consumption’, elitist, and a mechanism for the middle class to feel less guilty, are investigated as they pertain to the THL (Dopierala, 2017; Littler, 2011).

In section 6.2.1, dweller statements around shifts in consumptive tendencies due to spatial restrictions are reviewed. Following this, section 6.2.2 investigates expressions of sacrifices and restrictions to convey morally superior consumption, as these were frequently articulated. Section 6.2.3 moves onto the claims of distancing the ‘self’ from traditional consumer culture to further review the ways in which dwellers frame their consumptive tendencies.

6.2.1 Consumptive shifts

Due to the spatial restrictions presented by ‘tiny’ living, shifts in enactment of consumption were of interest to this research. Dwellers were asked to explain any changes in patterns or habits around the home since going ‘tiny’, including changes around grocery shopping, cooking, driving, storing items, spending time and buying items. Additionally, dwellers were

asked to explain any shifts in usage of technologies or skill development that impacted the enactment of daily patterns or habits. This inquiry was meant to explore how spatial constraints influenced patterns of consumption.

Several dwellers were initially eager to explain how patterns or habits have changed minimally or not at all since adopting the THL. For example, Jackie (early 50s, female, Detractor) relayed ‘nothing really had to change because of the upfront work that was put into it’. This was especially a common sentiment around cooking and eating habits. Many expressed that the tiny house is built to the needs of the individual, a unique aspect of the THL, thus spatial restrictions impose only slightly on the day-to-day life. Indeed, as reviewed in chapter 4, many found a sense of ‘freedom’ in the customisability of these homes. For instance, Elizabeth (mid 30s, female, Detractor) stated how she did not have to change much due to the way she designed it:

‘I designed a large kitchen that is useable because I know my lifestyle so I designed it around my lifestyle...the cooking part is fine, I designed it that way.’

Alice (late 20s, female, Compromiser) found a similar result:

‘Cooking has really changed almost not at all. I have a double sink, 4 burners, a large oven...I pretty much do everything the same...that is made possible by the fact that I built a large kitchen into my house.’

Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male, Detractors) echoed this sentiment:

‘Believe it or not, the kitchen that I designed, the counter space it's more than [Silvia] had at her old apartment...We have a small gas stove, so it didn't alter our habits that drastically.’

When Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor) was asked about how much has shifted, she explained:

‘As far as the food stuff goes, not that much...We go to the grocery store more often and buy less stuff...There hasn't been a drastic change.’

Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 present the kitchens of three dwellers. As displayed, these kitchens all have hobs, ‘apartment sized’ fridges (approximately 2/3rds the size of a full-size American fridge), and small sinks, while two have ovens. These spaces resemble and are equipped with many features of ‘traditional’ kitchens, affirming claims that kitchen habits changed minimally.



Figure 6.1 Will and Jo's kitchen (Dweller's photo)

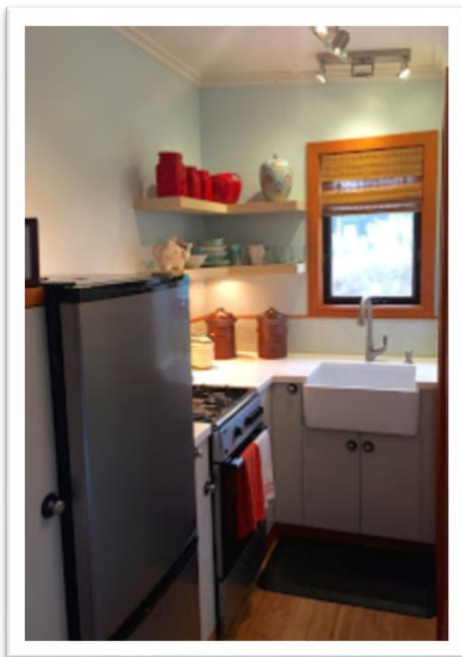


Figure 6.2 George's kitchen (Dweller's photo)



Figure 6.3 Cara's kitchen (Dweller's photo)

The minimal changes in cooking habits for several dwellers is seemingly a success of the self-build and design aspects of the THL, although these eager statements of minimal and non-intrusive changes should be considered around the need to justify this lifestyle by dwellers, as displayed in prior empirical investigations in this thesis. This consideration is supported by the fact that some dwellers expressed changes in food/cooking. However, these were almost always articulated as positive changes, suggestive of the desire to explain these shifts and thus living 'tiny' as responsible choices.

Ben (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) identified the clear shift in needing to grocery shop more as a positive aspect of the THL:

‘Because I have less space, it creates incentive, to shop more and to eat more freshly.’

Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) explained the positive ways ‘tiny’ living reduced food waste and caused him to cook with fresher ingredients:

‘I would say they've shifted [cooking patterns] in a really positive way and I think this would fall under the umbrella in that I think tiny and minimal living, you know you can't keep as much stuff...you get out and get more fresh stuff and just cook it. I spend a lot of time preparing my food.’

Similarly, Oscar (mid 20s, male, Compromiser) explained the way that a smaller kitchen/fridge helped him be less wasteful, although he found the need to frequently shop an annoyance:

‘I grocery shop more often for meat and vegetables because we can't store a lot at once due to our fridge being small. Which is really annoying, but saved money by not having the food go old.’

Joshua (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) articulated positive shifts in food habits:

‘We make all food from scratch... Yeah, we don't buy packaged or processed foods.’

Continuing, Joshua excitedly expressed other shifts that have occurred with ‘tiny’ living:

‘We recycle a lot more than we throw away...we definitely try to limit our purchasing altogether, we make a lot of things, repurpose clothes to make clothes for our son, shop at thrift stores.’

Many dwellers noted the ways in which they are more intentional about consumption. For instance, Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male, Detractors) stated:

‘We are a lot more purposeful in terms of consumption as far as household goods are concerned, we don't go out and buy throw pillows.’

Elizabeth (mid 30s, female, Detractor) explained how the THL helped her in shifting the ways she consumes due to spatial restrictions:

‘It helped me minimise all my possessions and live a more minimalistic lifestyle...I like the minimalistic lifestyle and the energy conservation aspect.’

These shifts towards a reduction in consumption (i.e. less food waste, more intentional about bringing items into the home, less energy use) are notable and promising. However, further review of dweller accounts exposes the extent to which spatial restrictions have reconfigured

subjectivities, igniting the question of the occurrence of a shift in mentality. For example, Elizabeth went on to explain:

'Especially with home goods, you know, I like to shop, sometimes I go to the TJ Maxx and see a really nice bowl, but think, oh I don't have space for it, I can't.'

Silvia and Chris (late 40s, female and male, Compromisers) noted that living in the tiny home has forced them to be 'more purposeful' with their consumption. Indeed, Silvia stated that she no longer even bothers to go into a store just to browse. At the same time, Silvia expressed feeling 'envious' of friends that have more space to decorate:

'Sometimes I will go to someone's house and sometimes I feel a little envious, [I went to my friend's and] she had a small cape cod house, but a big living room and couch, I felt a little envious, sometimes I miss it, because I do like to decorate so I wish I had more to decorate.'

These contradictions highlight the actualities of changes in consumptive tendencies beyond tiny living. Several dwellers implied that shifts in patterns of consumption were the result of spatial constraints rather than in how they view consumption. Furthermore, while reduced consumption, with or without a shift in mentality, is impactful, these suggestions are not as straightforward as expressed as many consumptive externalities were identified, or the ways in which consumption is pushed outside the home due to reduced home size (reviewed in section 6.3).

Dwellers were eager to explain the shifts in patterns/habits around the THL as minimal, easy, and positive, implying that taking responsibility over their housing in this way (i.e. adopting the THL) has required little adjustment and/or resulted in positive changes. Arguably, these THL dwellers, motivated by greater financial security, recognise their patterns of consumption through the lens of being self-governed into taking care of the 'self' and home (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Dean, 1999). Dweller discourses are led by the desire to be viewed as active and responsible around their decision-making as consumers, rather than being 'restricted' into changing patterns of consumption. Yet further expressions relayed the existence of other consumptive desires beyond 'tiny' living. The next section reviews how dwellers were keen to moralise consumption when shifts were required, claiming a superiority in restricting and sacrificing around the THL and attaching this 'more ethical' consumption to their development of the 'self'.

6.2.2 Restrictions and sacrifices

Empirical evidence highlighted how a majority of THL dwellers expressed restricting or avoiding consumption in order to pursue a more fulfilled and/or ethical livelihood. This is notable as the contemporary global economic crisis due to neoliberal policymaking has been utilised by governing bodies to further place the responsibility on the consumer subject to act morally, restrict, and to sacrifice in times of economic uncertainty (Harvey, 2005; Flint, 2003; Clarke and Newman, 2012). Featherstone (1990), Falk (1994), and Conrad (1994) highlight how individuals are motivated to perform self-control, discipline, and self-denial around consumption pertaining to their bodies in this modern capitalistic era. Indeed, Conrad (1994) exposed how individuals perform self-surveillance around their bodies in the form of diet and exercise to appear self-disciplined, developing subjectivities as less deviant (more fit) citizens. Similarly, a majority of dweller accounts suggested that these acts of restricting are part of their ‘project of the self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). For instance, Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) listed all the ‘modern conveniences’ that he does not have, even comparing his house to other tiny houses that seem ‘irrational’:

‘It doesn't have the modern conveniences that a lot of people are trying to jam into their tiny house, which I find irrational personally. You know, I don't have a washer, dryer, I don't have a dishwasher. I don't have a microwave. I have a stove and toaster oven and it works fantastic.’

He continued on to explain that the lifestyle of minimalism ‘feels really, really good’. Similarly, Bill (mid 60s, male, Detractor) eagerly highlighted the ways in which he restricts around food consumption since adopting the THL, as he currently fasts until lunch, only cooking/eating two meals a day, stating that it has ‘worked really well for him’. Jim, partner of Melissa (early 40s, female and male, Detractors), who was fervent to speak of his ‘extreme minimalism’ and how he does not ‘need a lot of items to be happy’, stated: ‘I've come to appreciate being a minimalist, all the shelves are very sparse.’

There is a sense that these dwellers are making a claim of being more ethical, while also proclaiming their satisfaction with these choices and how positive an experience it has been for them. For example, Jim stated that he is fulfilled with very little, which is a superior way to be. Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser) spoke of cutting ‘everything’ out of her life and having fewer possessions:

‘I wanted to cut everything out of my life...having fewer of those possessions seemed like it would be a way to live a more simple life.’

She thus conveys a desire to restrict in order to pursue a better version of herself. The avoidance of particular patterns of consumption has seemingly aided in creating, maintaining and advancing the way dwellers understand themselves. This argument is supported by Gould et al. (1997) and Wattanasuwan (2005) and their work on the ways in which avoiding, or ‘trying not to’ consume, is attached to the ‘self-creation’ project. Dwellers spoke of avoiding specific objects and services (i.e. having a washer, dryer, dishwasher, food) that they have come to deem undesirable in order to be a better version of the ‘self’, although for many dwellers this ‘avoidance’ around the THL is forced by the spatial restrictions, rather than a directed effort at ‘trying not to’ consume.

Similarly, a majority of dwellers noted the consumptive sacrifices made, or what they gave up or continue to give up in going ‘tiny’, and the resultant positive feelings. Many expressed a similar sentiment to Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) and Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser), stating ‘it felt good to me when I got rid of loads of things’ and ‘I enjoy getting rid of stuff’, respectively. Cameron went on to explain, ‘I love everything about minimal living and tiny living, it feels really, really feels good to me’. While Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor) was eager to highlight what she ‘gave up’ in adopting the THL:

‘There's a lot of things about it that I gave up as far as space and ability to have big pieces of furniture and stuff like that.’

Furthermore, several dwellers attached notions of freedom and liberation to these sacrifices:

‘We don't need a lot of things...[when] we downsized we got rid of a lot of stuff that wasn't necessary. We got rid of a lot of clothes, random appliances...it feels really freeing when you get rid of stuff.’ (Will and Jo, mid 30s, male and female, Compromisers)

While, Niko (late 20s, male, Compromiser) also found liberation in the experience of getting rid of things:

‘Things I never thought I'd get rid of, but I got rid of it, it's almost a lifestyle change...ultimately it's a great thing, it is very liberating, that you don't have to have this stuff.’

For Niko, this sense of liberation or freedom in purging items and changing the way he consumes is linked to how he views the opportunity to choose a ‘new lifestyle’, as he stated

repeatedly. Therefore, arguably he understands his freedom as a choice to adopt a new lifestyle through purging the old. For several dwellers, whether explicitly stated or simply conveyed through the idea of feeling good after getting rid of ‘stuff’, a sense of freedom and legitimisation was obtained through this process. Choice and freedom for these individuals seems to be rooted in the opportunity to live in opposition to consumptive practices and materialism deemed inferior, irresponsible, and unethical through the purging of items (Bauer et al., 2012; Belk, 1985). While freedom was also found in the opportunity to pursue a different lifestyle, or new direction for their ‘self-project’. Indeed, Binkley (2006) claims that freedom occurs in contemporary democracies through the opportunity provided by consumption for the ‘self’ to transform. Cruikshank (1999) argues that liberal democracies use empowerment around voluntary small-scale, ‘everyday’ practices, or technologies of citizenship, as a means to subjectify and create productive citizens. Dwellers voluntarily join onto restrictive and sacrificial patterns of consumption, while attaching a heightened sense of empowerment, freedom, liberation, choice and morality to their role as a responsible consumer-citizen.

Similarly, some dwellers developed their consumer subjectivities around the desire to perform certain ‘controls’ over consumption. As dwellers are able to choose how to act as self-disciplined consumers, or decide how they prefer to restrict and what they choose to sacrifice, thus decide ‘how’ to be responsible and ethical. This is exemplified by Melissa, partner of Jim (40s, female and male, Detractors), who stated that she questions purchasing new items and bringing them into the home, yet also explained her regret over the decision to get rid of her treadmill when ‘going tiny’. Eventually, she purchased a new one for the tiny house, as shown folded up in Figure 6.4.

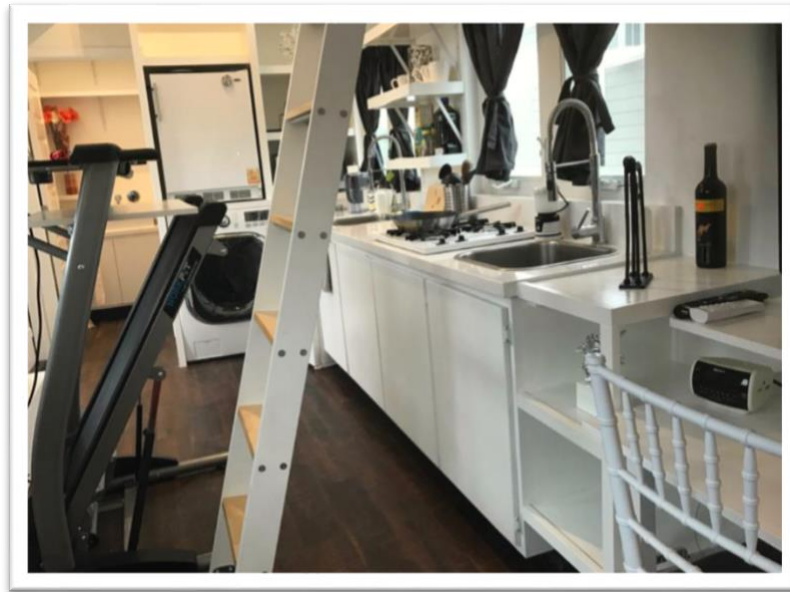


Figure 6.4 Making room for a treadmill (Dweller's photo)

Zavestoski's (2002) work on how having control over consumer 'choices' provides a sense of control over one's life links to these empirical findings. Dwellers still consumed in more 'mainstream' ways which were perhaps deemed less responsible (i.e. purchasing a new treadmill for the tiny home). Yet, these are arguably viewed by dwellers as acceptable due to acts of restricting or sacrificing in other areas. Dwellers, many of whom avoid commercial consumption due to spatial restrictions, are finding a sense of control in having the 'choice' around what and how to restrict/sacrifice. This observation sits within the understanding that anti-consumption and materialism are not opposites but on the same continuum (Lee and Ahn, 2016; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Iyer and Muncy, 2009). Similarly, Featherstone (1990) describes the maintenance of control and self-discipline and the release of control and indulgence as two imperatives of consumer culture which are in continual negotiation with each other.

Dwellers have attached a 'self-creation' project to their patterns of consumption around the THL. Similarly, Gould et al. (1997) and Wattanasuwan (2005) identified minimalism and anti-consumption lifestyles to be linked to the 'self-creation' project. This argument is further supported by scholarship that found these lifestyles are largely about self-actualisation and personal growth (Zavestoski, 2002) and the rejection of practices impeding a sense of happiness and freedom (Rodriguez, 2017). Indeed, dwellers are on a mission to create themselves through the ways in which they consume and talk about their consumption around

the THL. Dweller accounts relayed finding happiness, freedom, and positive experiences in restricting and sacrificing. The moralisation of consumption, such as the association of materialism with negative and unethical qualities (Bauer et al., 2012; Belk, 1985), has steered the way dwellers understand these shifts in patterns of consumption. Dwellers have identified tendencies to avoid when in pursuit of being an ethical consumer and optimal version of the 'self'. However, these patterns of consumption must be understood around the forced need to restrict/sacrifice due to the spatial aspects of the tiny home. Therefore, most dwellers are not outright 'choosing' not to consume, but they are 'choosing' how to be restricted in order to reduce consumption. Dweller statements are legitimising this lifestyle through the internalisation of discourses around ethical consumption, minimalistic tendencies, and choice. At the same time, dwellers are reconfiguring 'selves' around these optimal ways of consuming, which for some, has resulted in positive changes (i.e. reduced food waste, reduced shopping) in consumptive habits in order to fully align with these newfound identities/lifestyles.

The next section reviews expressions of distancing oneself from traditional consumer culture in order to explore how dwellers understand the positioning of the THL as it relates to consumerism.

6.2.3 Distancing the 'self' from traditional consumer culture

The THL is often marketed and promoted as offering an opportunity to live outside of traditional consumer culture (Shafer, 2010; Anson, 2013). This section explores empirical findings around this notion in order to contribute to considerations of this claim.

The distancing of oneself from traditional consumer culture was expressed frequently by approximately half of dwellers in order to make the distinction of living outside of or in contrast to this inferior way of consuming. Interestingly, Compromisers expressed notions of distancing from traditional consumer culture more often than Detractors. For instance, Joshua (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) was quick to explain:

'My partner and I come from the normal American consumption lifestyle and there's still ingrained patterns of consumption that are hard to break [like] ordering things on Amazon.com...but I'm trying to I remind myself, compared to other Americans this is so little.'

Joshua expressed his awareness of the areas in which he can improve and be more self-disciplined with his consumption. Simultaneously, he compared himself to other Americans in order to benchmark his level of morality around consumption. Joshua seemed to feel guilt, perhaps linking it to a moral obligation to act against a version of American consumerism that he noted is where he and his partner ‘come from’ but considers unethical. Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor) articulated a distancing from consumerism through identifying an inferiority in valuing it:

‘I think consumerism is a disease, when your life is empty you become addicted to things, people are like, ‘it’s Saturday, what do you want to do, let’s go shopping...that’s not something to do.’

This highlights how anti-consumption mentalities arise through the articulation of the rejection of ‘mainstream’ consumerism (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), as the need to responsabilise this lifestyle has resulted in this expressed differentiation.

Similarly, several dwellers, predominately Compromisers, communicated issues with ‘society’ and how things are; the ‘current economic system’, and the promotion of ‘things you are ‘supposed’ to have’, while suggesting the THL is outside these problems. For instance, Oscar (mid 20s, male, Compromiser) stated:

‘I know [now] that I can live without television, internet, materialistic things, etc. and it's made me realize that society has built a need for these things when in reality you can be happy without them.’

Similarly, Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser) explained how the THL requires a person to become disassociated from traditional consumer culture:

‘I think once you get into the tiny house thing you have to become disassociated with material things, cause you have to get rid of a lot obviously. I don't really buy new stuff unless I absolutely need it.’

One can assume these reflections are directed at the current neoliberal capitalistic economic state, suggesting the THL exists beyond the faults of the current system. For instance, Ben (mid 30s, male, Compromiser) claimed:

‘Our current economic system, the amount of resources we have is problematic and [tiny houses] address this issue.’

Cameron (early 40s, male, Detractor) also expressed the sentiment that the THL allowed for him to live outside the promotion of ‘things you are supposed to have’ which he deems ‘really unsatisfying’, while Joel (late 20s, male, Compromiser) stated that the THL offered a lifestyle change outside of the ‘cheapness’ of traditional consumer culture:

‘For us, it was a lifestyle change full on, even down to the clothes, clothes are made so cheap these days.’

Will and Jo (mid 30s, male and female, Compromisers) explained their perspective on ‘society’ and a ‘Walmart’ mentality:

‘I think that is also a part of society, unfortunately Walmart has made it possible for everyone to get everything they want but it is all really cheap and crazily made and it will break really easily, then they replace it and that adds to our landfill.’

This critique exists from a perspective of privilege, as Walmart shoppers have relatively low incomes (Pew, 2005), and ‘Walmart culture’ is something many individuals cannot avoid. Lower-income families, often reliant on limited public transport, have fewer shopping options often monopolised by Walmart and other ‘big box’ shops (Ellickson and Grieco, 2012). Will and Jo explained how they have acted against these traditional patterns of consumption through making several items at home. While several dwellers, like Joel, stated that in order to counter-act the ‘throwaway’ and wastefulness promoted by ‘society’, one should buy better quality items. Again, this mentality is one of privilege as this requires a larger initial investment. Fernandez et al. (2011) show that some individuals establish heroic self-images from resisting ‘mainstream’ markets. Indeed, improved self-images were evident from dweller accounts that eagerly distanced and differentiated themselves from traditional consumer culture.

Empirical data suggests elitism and privilege in some aspects of the THL, as has similarly been found by Carfagna et al. (2014) in their exploration of conscious consumerism.

Dwellers explained the inferiority of consuming in a manner that many cannot choose to avoid. This is reinforced by the fact that the THL is only accessible to those with money or credit available to afford upfront housing costs. Additionally, elitism and privilege arose in the way dwellers can choose how and when to reduce consumption. This aligns with the accusation of the THL appropriating poverty, as living in a small space and restricting and sacrificing is not a choice for many (Westhale, 2015). At the same time, empirical evidence

highlighted how the THL can be considered another ‘mode of consumption’, or a commodified version of sustainability, just as other similar lifestyles have been described (Dopierala, 2017, p. 67). The THL and what it is suggested to represent (i.e. more responsible living beyond traditional consumption) has been ‘commodified’ by many of these individuals to support their ‘project of the self’ and their image as a person who is living outside wasteful and unethical lifestyles. Dwellers use this form of consumption (i.e. expressions of anti-consumption) as a mechanism to position themselves in society.

Additionally, these claims of the THL being a commodified version of sustainability should be situated within discourses attached to and deemed optimal within the THL community. As Flint (2003) notes, ‘ethopower/ethopolitics’ support ‘the use of community as a technique for shaping ‘responsible’ self-conduct’ (p. 612). The following ethnographic observation highlights these prevalent discourses around the THL community that have been adopted by dwellers. Topics suggestive of countering traditional ways of consuming, such as minimalism, simple living, permaculture and living off-grid, were discussed by several ‘big name’ speakers at the annual Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado Springs, CO. These discourses took place amongst the display of several state-of-the-art tiny ‘Disneyfied’ home models with all the latest tiny versions of traditional gadgets.

Field diary entry, 5th of August 2016

The speaking schedule was packed with the ‘big names’ of the tiny house movement, including movement igniters Jay Shafer and Ken Griswold. Jay Shafer, the founder of the tiny house movement and known for appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* twice, solidified his rock star status among the community. Ultimately, Jay Shafer is exactly what one would expect from the ‘founder of a movement’, someone who thinks outside the box, slightly quirky yet charismatic. He started with a desire to live differently; an idea about simple living, minimalism, and living small, he explained. Jay’s final thought on how one consumes space within the home exemplified his minimalistic and ‘out of the box’ mentality: reaching out his arms as wide as they could go on either side, he stated ‘after all, this is all the space I need at any given time’.

Clarke’s (2007) take on the citizen-consumer is relevant here, as he showcases the ways in which citizenship has become intertwined with governing practices that push for an ethical consumer. Empirical evidence highlighted these dwellers’ desires to be seen as responsible citizen-consumers, partly through their acknowledgement of the destructive nature of

traditional consumption. However, the extent to which dwellers refuse a version of neoliberal capitalist consumer tendencies is uncertain, as indeed the THL seemingly acts as a ‘mode of consumption’ or commodified version of sustainability for many (Dopierala, 2017, p. 67). These empirical accounts support Rodriguez’s (2017) argument that much of the contemporary minimalist movement is a response to ‘specificities of capitalism as they manifest in the United States’ (p. 6). Similarly, the THL is seemingly another manifestation or ‘mode’ of embedded capitalistic tendencies, yet dwellers claimed that the THL sits in opposition to or outside of ‘mainstream’ consumption. Again, this claim of morality is part of legitimising and responsabilising the THL.

As presented above, Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor) made claims of the faults of traditional consumer culture, yet views her consumptive choices as superior to ‘shopping’ or the accumulation of things. The following ethnographic observation of a tiny house visit exposes her patterns of consumption and how the THL is another ‘mode of consumption’ for Tessa. She was eager to explain that ‘consumerism is a disease’ whereby people are addicted to things, and yet built a state-of-the-art tiny home which features all the latest gadgets:

Field diary entry, 10th of October 2016

Tessa’s hybrid car featuring a sticker that states ‘my other hybrid is a tiny house!’ sits in front of her home. She greets me outside and welcomes me in. Tessa’s home is a state-of-the-art tiny home, with all the latest gadgets and sleek features. It is clear why she has shown her home at several tradeshow. She presents all the features of the home, including glass on her two doors which transitions from clear to opaque with the click of a button. She also has a security system, motion sensors, and outside lights that are all linked to her phone. The most striking feature of the home is the Japanese metal cabinets that line almost the entirety of one wall of the home. She opens them to show deep spaces, well organised, with pull-out drawers. One drawer that she opens reveals huge quantities of jewellery. Tessa also shows me her closet with two rods at different heights full of clothes and hanging shoe storage. Her fridge is packed full, neatly organized. Pots, pans, plates, bowls, etc. are stored in the Japanese cabinets above the stovetop and dishwasher. Next to the kitchen area sits the combination washer and dryer. The bathroom features a full-size shower, sink, and incinerating toilet. Tessa explains that she set up her electrical wiring so that she is able to operate all her appliances at once, as she does not want to wait for one to finish to operate the next. Tessa’s home is exceptionally modern and sleek, featuring gadgets I never knew existed, the only aspect she seems to be sacrificing is space.

Figures 6.5 and 6.6 present Tessa's home space and closet as described in the field diary entry.



Figure 6.5 Tessa's living room/kitchen (Author's photo)

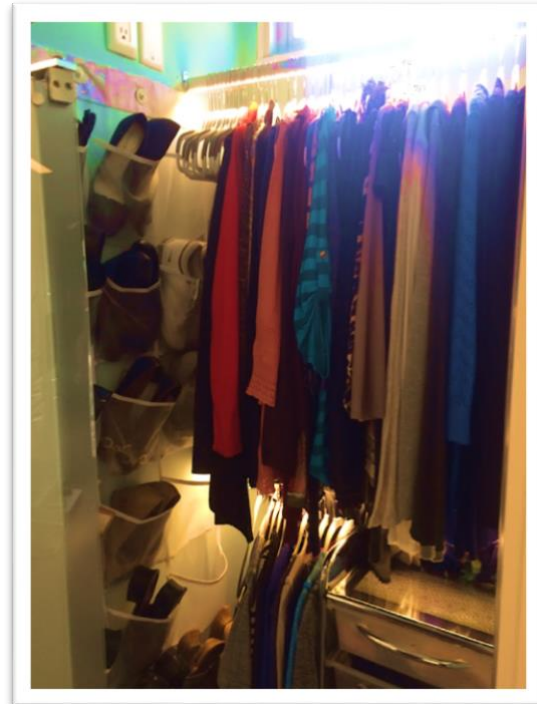


Figure 6.6 Tessa's closet (Author's photo)

To summarise, patterns of consumption were investigated throughout this section (6.2). Dweller accounts suggested a desire to be viewed as active and self-determining consumers, explaining shifts in consumption due to 'tiny' living as non-intrusive and positive. The need to reduce consumption due to spatial elements was claimed to be a resistance to a version of consumerism they have come to deem morally inferior, thus legitimising, moralising and responsabilising their patterns of consumption around the THL. The recent 'ethical turn' in consumption was used by dwellers to support these new patterns of consumption around the THL (Lewis and Potter, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Binkley and Littler, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005). As argued in prior chapters, dwellers are on a mission or 'project of the self' to optimise at the individual level according to self-governing practices that work through one's values and beliefs (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Consumption around housing was determined to be fundamental to this 'project' (Flint, 2003). These dwellers adopted this housing option amidst economic uncertainty, yet have developed 'selves' according to this newfound lifestyle and resultant patterns of consumption. Empirical evidence indicated that many dwellers have transformed their consumer subjectivities around discourses prevalent within the THL

community (i.e. minimalistic, living outside consumer culture). The next section presents the tensions and contradictions that have the potential to counter these claims of living in a more ethical manner. The intent is to further review the actualities of these ‘everyday’ patterns at play in the construction of consumer subjectivities.

6.3 Consumptive externalities

‘Consumptive externalities’, or the ways in which consumption has been pushed outside of the home due to spatial restrictions, are investigated within this section to further review patterns of consumption. The following ‘consumptive externalities’ were determined to be most prevalent, from most to least: (1) ‘one in, one out’ mentality; (2) use of external storage space; and (3) external spending (money spent on items that could not have been purchased prior to adoption due to the financial cushion provided by the THL). This investigation aids in an assessment of how discourses were adopted by these dwellers to develop consumer subjectivities suggestive of living outside of and superior to traditional consumerism. Additionally, how dwellers make choices around their materialism, in order to perform certain ‘controls’ over consumption, is examined. As argued above, dwellers are able to choose how to act as self-disciplined consumers, while ‘consumptive externalities’ highlight the way these choices force consumption to happen in different ways. Detractors were found to partake in ‘consumptive externalities’ more frequently than Compromisers and the implications of this are reviewed around each externality.

In section 6.3.1, the ways in which dwellers bring material items into the home through discarding others are critiqued. Following this, section 6.3.2 presents the use of external spaces to store items outside of the home. Finally, section 6.3.3 investigates how dwellers spend beyond the home due to the financial ‘cushion’ provided by this low-cost lifestyle.

6.3.1 ‘One in, one out’

Notably, in terms of buying less ‘stuff’, a very common sentiment among more than half of the dwellers, the mentality of ‘one out, one in’ arose. Dwellers stated that in order to bring in new items, old items must go (either for donation or being thrown away). Interestingly, despite being steered by anti-consumption discourses, most were unbothered by relaying this message, and many previously claimed to be more conscious of their consumption since going ‘tiny’. While some did note that they buy higher quality items to last longer, this

‘throw away’ mentality, so common in traditional consumer culture, seems to have infiltrated the THL. As Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor) openly admitted:

‘I have a TJ Maxx addiction. I still go out every couple months and buy a bunch of stuff then come home and decide which things to get rid of.’

Bill (mid 60s, male, Detractor) stated that ‘one out before one comes in now’. Cara (mid 20s, female, Compromiser) spoke of the ‘one in, one out’ mentality, noting that she would have to replace something if purchasing a new item:

‘I think it totally has changed how I purchase things, even if I’m shopping with friends...now I’m like do I like it enough to replace something I have.’

Both Jackie (early 40s, female, Detractor) and Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male, Detractors) articulated this notion, respectively:

‘If I do bring something in, it is to replace something, I can throw something out or donate something.’

‘Definitely when I buy stuff, [I ask] do I have enough space? I have to take one out to replace one.’

This sentiment supports the argument that many dwellers have not transformed subjectivities towards minimalism, but a forced reduction in consumption has occurred due to spatial restrictions. The lack of guilt around this externality, despite the desire to be an ethical consumer, perhaps suggests this process still represents an anti-consumption mentality for these dwellers, as it addresses the accumulation of material goods. The implications of Detractors performing this more often than Compromisers is arguably indicative of the previously developed consumer subjectivities around traditional consumer lifestyles. Therefore, despite the uncertainty of a shift in mentality, it is notable that these dwellers are expressing more intentionality and purposefulness around buying new items.

6.3.2 External storage space

Six dwellers (all Detractors) admitted to the use of an external storage space. Seemingly, prior lifestyles of accumulation resulted in obtaining items that were now difficult to part with for these Detractors. At the same time, as this is clearly in opposition to the pursuit of being an ethical and responsible citizen-consumer, as well as the THL community discourses of minimalism and anti-consumption, many conveyed a sense of guilt or attempted to explain

this choice. For instance, Melissa and Jim (early 40s, female and male, Detractors) clearly felt guilt, both in the fact that she referred to it as a ‘dirty secret’ and that Jim adamantly expressed that it is not his. After all, it does not align with what he deems superior consumption and his claims of being an ‘extreme minimalist’. Kristin (mid 40s, female, Detractor) explained ‘I do have a little storeroom that I pay for monthly’ but was quick to express that she only has ‘the most important stuff in that’. While she seems to recognise that this storeroom is not the responsible choice, she still has attachment to belongings she has decided to keep. All of which, she has deemed ‘most important’ in order to justify continuing to own them and paying for a monthly room to store them. Conversely, Bill (mid 60s, male, Detractor) had no guilt around his use of external spaces. Despite the fact that he is eager to ‘live close to the land ecologically’, Bill uses the main house on the property where his home is parked for several purposes, including showering and cooking:

‘I can do all that in the [main] house and I can come out and sleep in the tiny house. I also have some storage in Ken's bookshop so I just jammed everything down there’. Here, Bill seemed to identify himself as someone who lives in a minimal manner, implying an improved self-image from adoption of the THL, despite utilising several resources beyond the tiny home. Jackie’s (early 40s, female, Detractor) reason for having a storage unit suggests a potential problem with the purging of ‘stuff’ so often noted by dwellers, as she admitted to not being sure of tiny living:

‘I wasn't in the place where I wanted to get rid of everything and because I don't know if this is what I'll do for the long term... I didn't want to get rid of everything, then down the line, change my mind and get all of that stuff again’.

This highlights the potential for future material accumulation around the THL. Indeed, many dwellers (all Compromisers and some Detractors) have future home aspirations beyond tiny living. The question arises as to the need for repurchasing purged items in the future when housing situations change, as it seems that many dwellers fill the space they have, and for some, a storage unit as well. For many of these Detractors, these storage spaces are arguably a way to keep one foot in their former, traditional livelihoods. While many recognised the contradiction in this, other reductions in consumption seemingly appeased these concerns. This brings into question the full commitment to this lifestyle by these dwellers.

6.3.3 External spending

A majority of dwellers, predominantly Detractors, noted that money was spent on other items that could not have been purchased prior to adoption due to the financial cushion provided by the THL. For instance, Debbie (early 50s, female, Detractor) stated that with ‘any extra money we have, we don't hesitate to go on trips’. Additionally, Debbie noted that she is not concerned with using heating or AC:

‘I don't think twice if we turn up the heat or the AC, or leave the AC accidentally on when we go out or overnight...I don't hesitate to run the washing machine’.

Essentially, she explained how having more financial resources allows her to spend money elsewhere without hesitation. Arguably, Debbie is legitimising her patterns of consumption through living in a more ‘responsible’ manner financially, while her consumption is entirely the result of her economic situation. The following ethnographic observation from a tiny home visit with Debbie and her daughter in Staten Island, NY exemplifies how consumption can be directed to other areas due to reduced financial burden. This home was built on a foundation in the 1950s as an accessory dwelling and is 37m², on the larger side of the tiny home spectrum:

Field diary entry, 8th of October 2016

As I approach the home, I notice a shed structure that looks to be under construction. Debbie comes out to greet me and explains that she is building a space for her daughter. As I meet her amiable daughter who is finishing her final year in high school and plans to live at home while she attends the local community college, the reasons become clearer. Her daughter, with little probing, expresses her frustration with the lack of privacy in the tiny home. She reveals her desire to have her own space to decorate and entertain friend, thus highlighting that in fact 37m² is not proving sustainable for Debbie and her daughter. Debbie is widowed, using the money from the sale of her former house for the purchase of this home. In addition, Debbie lost her job just after moving into the home. Although she is again employed, she conveys a sense of relief in having the tiny home paid for outright during this challenging time. Debbie expresses regret in the fact that she had planned to spend the extra money from tiny living on travelling with her daughter. The loss of her job impeded this plan, as she is still rebuilding her savings. At the same time, Debbie and her daughter are both eager to talk about the smaller trips and cruises they have taken. Debbie explains that she no longer worries about spending money, then goes on to talk about her plans to renovate the kitchen area, as it is indeed a bit shabby from age. In contrast to other tiny dwellers, it is clear the Debbie is not concerned with being or

even acting as if she is environmentally concerned. Seemingly, her decision-making specific to consumption revolves around finances.

Several dwellers explained that extra money provided by the 'financial freedom' of the THL was used for experiential things rather than material items. Again, this should be understood amidst the 'messy' ways that consumption happens around the THL, as the extent to which dwellers are shifting mentalities and choosing 'not to consume' material goods or simply being restricted into not accumulating 'things' due to space is uncertain. Dweller accounts highlighted how money is spent on 'doing' rather than buying 'things'. For instance, Susan (mid 60s, female, Detractor) noted:

'The cushion, it's given us quality life things, taking classes, travel, being able to help out friends and family with money.'

Tessa (late 30s, female, Detractor) explained that she is now able to go to Ireland every year. She also articulated that she is:

'Partying every weekend, blowing money on alcohol...We go fishing almost every weekend. It's not inexpensive...everything is pricey but I don't care.'

Bill (mid 60s, male, Detractor) explained how being debt-free allows him to consider travelling abroad for half the year:

'I'm debt-free so I'm thinking, now, ok I've got good computer skills, I think I'm just going to go and contract for 6 months and travel for 6 months, so I'd spend the summers in the US, then the US winters in New Zealand.'

Jackie (early 50s, female, Detractor) also viewed the possibility of travel as a desirable feature of the THL, 'I wanted something that would allow me to travel more'.

Dwellers' differentiation between consumption around material goods and experiences (i.e. travel and fishing) links to scholarship that found materialism results in a sense of lacking control (Sivanathan and Pettit, 2010; Lee and Ahn, 2016). Dwellers are developing their subjectivities through being individuals that 'do' and 'experience' rather than accumulate things, linking to their 'projects of the self'. Arguably, this provides dwellers with a sense of control over how they are being restricted in their consumption amidst the THL. These empirical findings highlight the claim that anti-consumerism and materialism sit on the same continuum (Lee and Ahn, 2016; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Iyer and Muncy, 2009), as dwellers view not accumulating goods in the home as acting against consumerism, seeming

not to consider the resource consumption involved in travel and other activities (i.e. giving people money to buy things, or performing hobbies that require material items).

This section (6.3) investigated how the THL has the potential to cause consumption to happen differently, igniting restriction and sacrifice, yet creating consumptive tendencies in other areas (ex. external storage units). This spotlights the tensions that exist around dweller claims of living in a superior and responsible manner. Seemingly, many dwellers have not ‘become’ minimalists but instead have been pushed into consuming less in some areas, while for many, not acknowledging or being unaware of the ways in which consumption has been forced elsewhere. Largely, these ‘consumptive externalities’ identified here further highlight how dwellers want the freedom to ‘choose’ how to consume. Dwellers then justified this decision-making through adopting discourses as more ethical consumers. A few dwellers did articulate feelings of guilt around consuming in ways that appeared undisciplined. This largely pertained to overt instances of not aligning with the THL community discourse of minimalism (i.e. having a storage space). Dwellers were seemingly trying to explain this away through acknowledgment of the ‘guilt’ or other explanations (i.e. it only has the most important items in it). However, in many instances, dwellers were reflexive and active in deciding how and when to consume, although at times it was clear that spatial restrictions dictated consumption.

The next section concludes with a review of the development of dweller subjectivities amidst these many identified ‘messy’ patterns of consumption.

6.4 Concluding remarks: the development of THL consumer subjectivities

This chapter investigated dweller patterns of consumption in order to explore the development of consumer subjectivities and consider the suggestion that the THL both counters traditional consumer-culture and provides a more ethical way to consume (Shafer, 2010; Anson, 2013). The development of consumer subjectivities was identified through the ways in which dwellers: (1) explained shifts as easy and minimal; (2) explained the need to change as positive and purposeful; (3) explained the need to restrict and sacrifice as superior and more ethical and fulfilling than consumption outside the THL; (4) minimally expressed guilt around ‘consumptive externalities’, or consuming in ways that align more with ‘mainstream’ consumption. Arguably, then, dwellers made consumptive choices and developed subjectivities at the point of intersection between the promotion of excessive consumption with

grandiose material accumulation that remains the norm within dominant discourse (Schor, 2005, 2010) and the recent 'ethical turn' in governing practices around consumption (Lewis and Potter, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Binkley and Littler, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005). Indeed, empirical evidence highlighted both the ways in which dwellers implied a morality and superiority in the way they have shifted consumption around the THL, and how more 'mainstream' forms of consumption remain (i.e. 'one in, one out' mentality, filling a storage space with 'stuff'). 'Ethopower/ethopolitics' (Rose, 2000) was found to manifest through the ways in which dwellers moralised their consumption around the THL and justified and internalised the need to restrict and sacrifice, identifying this as necessary in order to obtain a secure home.

The approach of this chapter, looking at the micro-level of 'everyday' patterns of consumption, allowed for a recognition of points of contestation and opportunities for dwellers to be active in the production of their consumer subjectivities (McKee, 2011, 2016; Flint, 2003). While the THL is not about escaping consumerism, as evidenced by the THL acting as another 'mode of consumption', within the very act of living 'tiny' sits the heightened opportunity for subjects to 'choose' how to consume. This resulted in the possibility for dwellers to 'contest from below' (McKee, 2011, p. 2), as empirical evidence suggested that power relations at this micro-level (the 'everyday' patterns of consumption), were, in fact, not reflective of larger power structures in many instances. Arguably, dwellers acted as a niche group of consumers that have developed localised discourses and practices in an attempt to act against norms. Dwellers did not internalise notions of being 'flawed' consumers, despite being unable or unwilling to consume 'normally' (Bauman, 1997), as dominant discourses still suggest that material accumulation is representative of a successful and hardworking individual (Schor, 2005, 2010). Instead, dwellers attached discourses around morality and personal fulfilment to the THL. The willingness to act 'abnormally' around consumption was a way to 'answer back' to discourses that steer capitalistic consumer tendencies towards excess and wastefulness. Dwellers mobilised discourses to express disdain and the inferiority of traditional consumer culture. In doing so, they 'chose' how to talk about the need to consume differently amidst their adoption of the THL. Dwellers identified freedom, choice, and improved self-image within the practice of performing 'controls' over their consumption. In this way, the THL challenged conduct around traditional consumer culture, while still existing within capitalistic tendencies. Empirical findings that highlighted how anti-consumption and materialism do not exist in

contradiction with one another but on the same continuum (Lee and Ahn, 2016; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Iyer and Muncy, 2009), and are in continual negotiation with each other (Featherstone, 1990), support this claim.

For both dweller types, Detractors and Compromisers, empirical evidence suggested that consumptive choices around the THL were fundamental to their 'project of the self', whereby consumption was used as an 'enterprise activity' to relay who they are in society and justify this position (Foucault, 2008, p. 226). Compromisers expressed distancing from traditional consumer culture more often than Detractors, while 'consumptive externalities' were articulated more often by Detractors. Perhaps for Compromisers the need to responsibilise the THL in this way is more necessary as these dwellers are younger and have not had the same opportunity to 'consume' housing. Compromisers are just developing their subjectivities around housing trajectories, while Detractors are reconfiguring their subjectivities to align more with the values of the THL. Therefore, Compromisers are seemingly more adamant about developing this distinction and viewing themselves as living outside wastefulness and the faults of consumerism. Further, Detractors performed 'consumptive externalities' more often and this further highlighted how these two types approach and understand how they consume differently. This is the result of adopting the THL for differing purposes, with different relationships to material and financial resources. Detractors have lived amongst traditional consumer culture, housing and debt as adults and established subjectivities within this context. Compromisers are developing subjectivities around looking to 'get on their feet' and save for the future, having less of a 'cushion' to consume. It seems many Detractors are reducing consumption due to spatial restrictions, while aligning subjectivities around ethical consumption in order to justify and take control over being restricted in this way while still conforming to ways of consumption developed prior to adoption of the THL. Perhaps these Detractors recognise this compromise between consumption before and after the THL, as this could explain why these dwellers were much less likely to express the THL as existing beyond or countering traditional consumer culture.

While empirical evidence revealed that many dwellers shifted consumption primarily due to spatial restrictions, this arguably resulted in more intentionality around the enactment of consumption. This created a reflexive consumer who considered consumptive tendencies and allowances more directly. In many ways, this housing opportunity created a cohort of people

who have adjusted themselves to be more considerate consumers, regardless of motivation or mentality shifts. Some dwellers have reconfigured themselves according to these newfound consumptive habits and others may follow. Additionally, for some, subjectivities were developed around THL community discourses that promote more minimalistic ways of consuming. However, it is through the steering of conduct towards the development of such ‘empowered’ communities that the neoliberal mentality of rule is successful. This is a tactic of governing bodies that place consumptive risks on the individual in order to reduce the need for state intervention (Flint, 2003, 2004; McIntyre and McKee, 2008; McKee, 2011; Cruikshank, 1999). Similarly to prior chapters, this investigation revealed the ‘messiness’ of subjects acting as intended and exposed the co-constructive nature in which dwellers can act as both the governed and the governor while being steered by neoliberal governing practices that prey upon the fundamental capitalist value of individuality.

7. Conclusion: Implications of the rise of the THL

7.1 Introduction

The THL gained popularity in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2007-2008, whereby the United States real estate investment bubble collapsed, devastating housing markets, resulting in mass repossessions and evictions (Desmond, 2017). Access to homeownership for first-time buyers was disrupted, forcing many to continue in the rental sector (Kennett et al., 2013). This global economic crisis due to irresponsible banking practices was and continues to be used by governing bodies to reform the public sector and cut spending (Clarke and Newman, 2012). This thesis provided an investigation around the implications of the ‘rise’ and growth of the THL in this context. The primary aim of this thesis was to position this post-recession response to housing amidst the traditional housing market, debt encumbrance and contemporary consumer culture. This research highlighted how tiny homes, a small and affordable housing option, which some critics have called ‘glorified trailers’, have gained popularity amongst middle- and upper-income individuals. The prolific growth can be witnessed in the booming tiny house industry, while small legal successes in recent years point to overcoming this barrier in some localities, perhaps allowing for more security in adoption. The implications of the growth of the THL are significant as this alternative housing response has the potential to shift housing trajectories, especially for the younger cohort. This cohort has entered the housing market at a point of caution and uncertainty, developing subjectivities and aspirations accordingly. Furthermore, the ‘recovery’ of the housing market continues to be supported by policies that disempower the buyer (Madden and Marcuse, 2016) and projections of the next US recession in the not-so-distant future are abundant (see for example Sen and Smith, 2018; Farrell, 2018; Irwin, 2018). Therefore, underscored by memories of the Great Recession, the potential for such alternative forms of housing to continue to shape housing trajectories remains. The onset and popularity of the THL also has the potential to impact sustainable housing opportunities. Housing is a fundamental human necessity, yet persists as a highly resource-intensive site (Landis et al., 2017). As global goals and public discourses acknowledge the need to address climate change, including ‘everyday’ patterns, the THL and other small-space options could contribute to the future of sustainable housing. This research exposed the need to continue to empirically explore small-living scenarios for this purpose.

This thesis took a unique approach to the investigation of the THL amidst the modern neoliberal mentality of rule, specifically, relying on quasi-ethnographic (non-archival) methods to examine both the onset and experience of an alternative housing option, and how consumption ‘happens’ around the THL. Ethnographic observations at a tiny house community, events and home sites, and semi-structured interviews with dwellers were used. Empirical evidence provided insight around governing practices involved in the adoption of this lifestyle (RO1), the experience of living in this way (RO2), and in consumptive aspects of going ‘tiny’ (RO3). This investigation makes an important empirical contribution to debates around sustainable housing (tiny home scholarship in particular), as well as wider scholarship within Housing Studies around the American dream and affordable housing, and consumption studies more broadly. It also makes a strong theoretical contribution to governmentality studies, specifically the value of an ethnographies of governmentality methodological approach. Areas in need of future exploration were identified. This chapter is structured to present these contributions.

7.2 Key findings: addressing the research aim and objectives

The aim of this research was to explore and explain the THL in the United States in order to gain a deeper understanding of this alternative housing option and also to review the experience of living ‘tiny’. The following sub-sections consider each research objective.

7.2.1 RO1: Understand the motivations for adopting ‘tiny’ living

The first objective investigated motivations for the adoption of the THL (RQ1) in order to understand the ‘points’ from which dwellers entered this housing option. An exploration of the extent to which dwellers ‘chose’ this lifestyle (RQ2) was included within RO1. This allowed for consideration of underlying governing mechanisms that may have steered dwellers’ expressions around their adoption. RO1 was considered within the first empirical chapter of this thesis, which reviewed the adoption of this alternative housing option alongside the American dream ethos and neoliberal governing tactics.

To review, two distinct dweller types were exposed through their divergent relationship to the traditional housing market that resulted in entering the THL from different ‘points’. For both types, data revealed how dwellers have been governed into pursuing homeownership, as it has been normalised as the ‘optimal’ tenure of choice (Gurney, 1999; Flint and Rowlands, 2003;

Ronald, 2008; McKee, 2011; McKee et al., 2017). Housing studies have sought to expose how the normalisation of homeownership promoted by the contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule influences housing ‘choice’ (for example Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008; McKee, 2011, 2012). This research adds to this scholarship through exposing how these dwellers, still governed by the promotion of the superiority of homeownership, despite economic hardship and insecurity due to the Great Recession, were willing to shift aspirations and become ‘tiny’ homeowners. Compromisers still aspired to another version of homeownership in the future. Similar to the work of McKee et al. (2017), this thesis highlighted how these young people ‘deconstruct this normalised ideal as a ‘fallacy of choice’ yet still internalise these distinctions between homeownership and renting (p. 318). Furthermore, these findings fit within scholarship on the governing of aspirations to create self-driven and responsible citizens who are less reliant on the state (for example Raco, 2009, 2012; Spohrer et al., 2018).

This research further contributes to recent scholarship on young people’s housing opportunities, in particular how this cohort understands and approaches housing in this contemporary neoliberal era. Much of this scholarship, using qualitative methods to give a ‘voice’ to these individuals, has focused on the UK context, referring to this cohort as ‘Generation Rent’ (see for example Hoolachan et al., 2017; McKee, 2012; Cole et al., 2016). This research provides a US understanding of this younger cohort, widely referred to as Millennials in US studies. Scholarship in the United States, largely using quantitative analysis, has reviewed the impact of student debt, labour market changes, the affordable housing crisis, and witnessing the Great Recession, on access to and rates of homeownership by young people (for example Dickerson, 2016; Bleemer et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2015; Clark, 2018). Findings from such literature have revealed that Millennials are staying at home longer with their parents and/or avoiding homeownership due to financial instability. This thesis provides an examination of how some young people are using the THL to ‘get around’ these barriers and gives a ‘voice’ and ‘everyday’ glimpse into this process. This research acknowledges that this opportunity is one of privilege as the upfront costs are significant and most Compromisers used loans or parents for assistance. Seemingly, these funds could have provided a down payment for purchasing a traditional home. However, high student loan debt disqualifies many Millennials from access to mortgage loans (Xu et al., 2015), but this burden was not interrogated by this research. These Compromisers expressed their perceived inability to access traditional homeownership. The THL did indeed provide minimal monthly

costs for these dwellers which resulted in the ability to pay off loans and expedited freedom from housing debt. Arguably, this younger cohort is acting with more caution around entering traditional homeownership and accruing traditional debt. It is uncertain how future housing aspirations will come to fruition; however, this research provides a significant contribution to this area in exposing one way this cohort is approaching and developing their housing trajectories.

Empirical data revealed motivations for adoption of the THL amidst this contemporary neoliberal era of restrictive housing. This investigation disclosed how dwellers identified freedom in this opportunity to live a more affordable lifestyle, and even attached notions of choice and empowerment, driven to be those that ‘act’ to avoid being labelled ‘flawed’ or ‘burdensome’. This exposed how freely dwellers ‘chose’ this lifestyle. Dwellers have been governed into understanding these provisions of the THL as ‘more free’ than what is provided by traditional housing, rather than the result of the neoliberal mentality of rule that has constrained ‘choice’ and created a burdensome economic situation for so many. These findings provide a theoretical contribution to understandings of how the contemporary neoliberal regime operates through ‘freedom’ (Rose, 1999a); this is reviewed below in section 7.3.

These findings contribute to understandings of the neoliberalisation of housing in this post-recession era, underscored by core American values of freedom and individualism. The impact of neoliberal policymaking on housing has been explored within housing research (see Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Immergluck, 2009; Drew and Herbert, 2013). These core values and the American dream ethos that upholds them underlie the commodification of housing and the normalisation of homeownership (see Archer, 2014). This thesis provides empirical evidence as to how these can come together to steer individuals towards an alternative housing ‘choice’ in this contemporary era. Additionally, ‘tiny’ living provided options otherwise not available within traditional housing trajectories (i.e. working less, having more time and energy) and these were identified as significant by many dwellers after adoption of the THL. These benefits beyond the financial are notable as they have the potential to alter the way dwellers view these aspects of their lives and thus approach future decisions around house, work and time. This may be of interest to academic studies that have explored shifts in the labour market in the US and how people spend their time, especially as it pertains to Millennials (for example Levenson,

2010; Alsop, 2008; Sujanksy and Ferri-Reed, 2009; Twenge et al., 2010; Garikapati et al., 2016).

Empirical findings contribute to understandings within tiny home scholarship on motivations for adoption of this lifestyle. This lifestyle is marketed by its proponents as offering a more sustainable, affordable, less regulated, and simplified housing and lifestyle option (Schafer, 2009; Mitchell, 2014; Anson, 2014, 2017). This research provided an exploration of the actualities of these provisions as motivators and exposed how and under what circumstances dwellers are driven to adopt the THL. This empirical contribution to the tiny homes scholarship is significant, as this is an area lacking academic investigation, and these findings support the uncertainty in conceptualising this lifestyle as a ‘social movement’. Dwellers were found to be primarily motivated by the desire for personal financial stability through taking responsibility and autonomy over housing in this way. This is in opposition to social or lifestyle movements that are defined by having the goal of fostering social change (McAdams and Snow, 1997; Featherstone, 1987; Haenfler et al., 2012). While small-space living is inherently less resource intensive and has the potential to support more sustainable housing trends that in turn create a wider positive social impact (returned to in section 7.2.3), this was not found to be a primary driver for any dwellers. These findings provide a different narrative from what is often suggested around the THL, whereby this lifestyle was firstly about the pursuit of individual security amidst economic uncertainties.

Furthermore, empirical findings contribute to American dream scholarship, as this research used the American dream ethos to situate the adoption of this housing ‘choice’. In recent years, scholarship has suggested that the American dream is variously in crisis (Putnam, 2015), sabotaged (Mettler, 2014), fading (Chetty et al., 2017), has been stolen (Smith, 2012), needs rescuing (Gandara, 2010), and needs reclaiming (Cornuelle, 2017). These claims are supported by the decline in social mobility, as the potential to earn more than one’s parents is on a downward trajectory with each decade (Chetty et al., 2017). Yet most Americans believe they have achieved the American dream or that they are on their way to achieving it (Pew Research Center, 2017). The findings of this thesis fit amidst this contradiction. Dwellers were found to be restricted around their housing options due to contemporary policymaking and financial restraints, yet they still aspired to a version of homeownership, a fundamental aspect of the contemporary American dream. Compromisers are using the THL to save now

in order to fulfil aspirations of future versions of the American dream. This research exposed how fundamental American dream values (individualism, self-reliance, autonomy) continue to drive decision-making, despite economic hardship and the burdensome nature of neoliberal policymaking, as dwellers were firstly seeking a more financially stable means to take individual responsibility over their housing. This observation has the potential to contribute to aspiration and empowerment scholarship (Raco, 2009, 2012; Spohrer et al., 2018; Cruikshank, 1999) that has explored how the neoliberal mentality of rule pushes for such a citizen. This thesis highlighted how governing practices continue to steer aspirations and understandings of empowerment in this post-recession era.

This investigation revealed the underlying governing mechanisms involved in contemporary housing ‘choices’ and exposed how individuals approach and make decisions around housing. The contribution of this exploration sits within understandings on the embedded nature of the American dream ethos, the traditional pursuit of housing, the steering of housing opportunities by neoliberal governance, and the potential for new trajectories to be developed. As identified, subjectivities shifted and newfound considerations around home needs and life priorities occurred around this alternative housing option, despite the primary motivator being financial. While primarily driven by pragmatic reasons, such as financial security, this uncovers the potential for alternative forms of housing to shift subjectivities and consequently alter future housing ‘choices’. However, this finding also further supports existing studies that have identified the overarching ways in which fundamental human rights, such as housing, are not only marketised to disempower the majority, but also are steered and directed towards ‘choices’ that benefit the neoliberal mentality of rule (Brown, 2015; Harvey, 2012; Crawford and McKee, 2018).

These findings aided in approaching the subsequent ROs. Once an understanding of the ‘points’ from which these dwellers entered the THL had been established, it was critical to expose the day-to-day experience of living in this way (RO2). The development of the two distinct types, Compromisers and Detractors, proved useful in reviewing RO2 and RO3 and provided a means to link each distinct chapter.

7.2.2 RO2: Understand the experience of ‘tiny’ living

The second objective examined the experience of ‘tiny’ living. RO2 was explored within the second empirical chapter of this thesis, which looked to expose how dwellers understand themselves amidst being or becoming a ‘tiny houser’, as articulated by most dwellers. This chapter considered dwellers’ identity formation (RQ3) under the neoliberal mentality of rule that pushes for the creation of self-governing, responsible, and ethical individuals (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000).

To review, the findings revealed how dwellers articulated being a ‘tiny houser’, creating distinctions between types of ‘tiny housers’ and suggestions of becoming better versions of the ‘self’ via their ‘tiny houseness’. Furthermore, dwellers valorised and justified these developed identities through creating and adopting divisions and/or binaries that imply superiority in the THL. This was reviewed using the Foucauldian tactic of ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982). This need to justify and differentiate oneself due to lifestyle ‘choices’ is similarly relayed in the work of Benson (2013) on affluent lifestyle migrants who relocated to France from Britain. Benson (2013) found that these individuals justified their decision through expressions of inauthentic livelihoods in an undesirable Britain, while expressing France as idyllic and more authentic.

The findings presented in this chapter also sit within the literature that has explored how identity is (re)constructed around house and home (for example Flint, 2003; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004; Chapman, 2004; Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2006). Specifically, this research may be of interest to studies on post-recession shifting of identities and feelings of insecurity around housing (for example Davidson, 2012). Davidson (2012) argues that the housing crisis could challenge ‘the ethos of acquisition that prevailed before the crash...[and] form the basis for a different understanding of property and identity’ (p. 121). Indeed, this thesis highlighted how dwellers responded to feelings of insecurity, (re)constructed identities to justify these responses, and shifted understandings of how they ‘choose’ to house themselves.

Furthermore, the data revealed how identity creation happened in and around these dwellings. Notions of individuality and meaning were attached to both the exterior and the interior space and décor. This was observed in how dwellers explained the individuality and freedom in self-build and DIY aspects of the home. These findings sit within scholarship on the

assignment of meaning to cultural commodities and supports Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen's (2006) argument that home décor acts as a means to express and develop the 'self'. Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2006) found that size, style, and location of one's home are a fundamental 'part of the power structure in society' (p. 26). However, this research provides insight on how this has shifted for these dwellers under restricted housing policy. As dwellers 'chose' to downsize in order to obtain more financial security and many compromised on location due to legal issues, the style of the home became ever-more important. Identity and meaning were attached to the process of building, designing, and decorating. This understanding also contributes to American dream scholarship through revealing how these dwellers made compromises around their American dream and (re)constructed identities to legitimise these decisions. This adds to scholarship on how the American dream is shifting (Eldredge, 2016), being 'reclaimed' (Cornuelle, 2017), and needs to be 'rehoused' (Bergdoll and Martin, 2012) and negotiated (Hill and Torres, 2010) in the contemporary era.

This examination also revealed how, for many, an appeasement of the American dream occurred through the process of commodifying these tiny dwellings. The exposure of this aspect of the THL by this research could add to future considerations within tiny home scholarship, as to the best knowledge of this researcher, this has yet to be explored.

Additionally, these findings contribute to scholarship on the commodification of housing and the influence of 'hyper-commodification' on contemporary housing trends (for example Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Rolnik, 2013). Data suggested that the commodification of these homes, or homes appearing as smaller versions of traditional American homes, made this small-living 'choice' more acceptable for some dwellers. Furthermore, this research found that many of these homes were intentionally made to look cute and brightly-coloured in order to appear more appealing and to reduce stigma around living 'small'. This observation may be of interest to scholarship around the 'Disneyfication' of American culture (Bryman, 1999).

Finally, empirical data exposed the 'messiness' of dwellers' claims of becoming 'resisters' via the THL. The investigation revealed the success of governing mechanisms that push to create self-governing individuals, who (re)construct and (re)produce their identities as a part of their 'project of the self' (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000), in order to reduce reliance on the state. At the same time, individuals were found to be active within this process as they took

the opportunity to redirect and ‘choose’ how they were steered. How dweller types related to and understood their acts of resistance was engaged with. This revealed the distinction between Detractors, who were critiquing institutions in which they have taken part, or intentionally avoided, and Compromisers, who adapted their life courses due to a ‘constraining’ housing and economic situation, thus were not outright active in the ‘choice’ of dissent. Yet, empirical data uncovered how dwellers crafted themselves to interrupt governing forces by reconstructing their identities to align with an alternative form of housing. These empirical findings contribute to scholarship on resistance and activated agency enacted around housing (see McKee, 2011, 2016; Flint, 2003) and adds to scholarship on the agency/structure interface relevant to housing ‘choice’ (see McKee, 2018). For example, while much of the UK literature on tenure choice suggests an awareness of structural constraints by individuals, this research found dwellers to be lacking an understanding of larger governing mechanisms. This was observed in the way the ‘faults’ of traditional housing were directed at blaming unaware and wasteful homeowners rather than neoliberal policymaking that has restricted housing opportunities.

Following on from the first empirical chapter, this chapter revealed the ways in which newfound identities can be easily established and valorised in order to justify a new ‘path’ taken. This chapter furthers understandings around how people come to recognise themselves and others amidst being steered by neoliberal mechanisms. Empirical data highlighted how individuals can be active in this process, as identity formation is not one-directional but occurs in a co-constructive manner. This exposure of the ‘messiness’ of identity formation revealed how alternative ‘choices’ around housing should be viewed at this point of intersection of individuals acting as both governed and governor.

The first and second empirical chapters provided an understanding of motivations for and experience of the THL and this underscored the investigation of patterns of consumption in and around these spaces (RO3).

7.2.3 RO3: Understand consumptive aspects of the THL

The third objective explored how consumption ‘happens’ around the THL. RO3 was investigated within the final empirical chapter of this thesis, which examined how dweller consumer subjectivities were developed around patterns of consumption (RQ4). Specifically, this investigation was looking to expose if and how consumption has shifted since adopting

‘tiny’ living and how dwellers understand these changes. Furthermore, the goal of this chapter was to explore the claims of the THL acting outside of consumer-culture and providing a more ethical way to consume, as suggested by dominant voices from the THL community, such as Shafer (2010) and Mitchell (2014, 2018).

To review, the findings revealed that dwellers were eager to explain shifts in consumption as minimal, easy and/or positive. When more burdensome shifts (i.e. restricting or sacrificing) were required, dwellers were keen to moralise and claim superiority around this consumption. This research contributes to understandings around the recent ‘ethical turn’ in consumption (for example Lewis and Potter, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Binkley and Littler, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005). This chapter provided an empirical review of how dwellers used this ‘consumer-oriented mode of citizenship’ to justify the need to restrict consumption and altered discourses and subjectivities accordingly (Lewis, 2008, p. 227). Dwellers attached a heightened sense of responsibility, choice, and fulfilment to their role as a consumer-citizen and their restrictive and sacrificial patterns of consumption. They were observed to find freedom and empowerment in having control over how they ‘chose’ to consume, and thus how they were restricted. Furthermore, dwellers developed localised discourses to express the ethical inferiority of traditional housing and consumer culture to legitimise their newfound subjectivities. These observations fit within scholarship on the onset of the citizen-consumer in the contemporary era (for example Clarke, 2007; Clarke et al., 2007; Bevir and Trentmann, 2007).

The development of consumer subjectivities around the THL were observed to be largely dependent on dweller type. Detractors, more likely to perform ‘consumptive externalities’, developed newfound consumer subjectivities amidst making a compromise with former ways of being. Compromisers, more adamant about the THL being in opposition to consumer culture, were arguably making these claims and developing subjectivities around saving for the future and thus responsabilising this path to ‘get on their feet’. The development of subjectivities occurred at the point of contestation of being governed into needing to restrict and sacrifice and being governor in deciding how and when to consume within these restricted parameters. This exploration of the construction of consumer subjectivities amidst the THL is relevant to scholarship that links consumption and identity (for example Mathur, 2013; Ruvio and Belk, 2013; Paterson, 2005) and more specifically consumption, identity,

and home or house (for example Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004; Reimer and Leslie, 2004; Madigan and Munro, 1996). These findings also contribute to the literature on the interface of structure and agency and ‘everyday’ patterns of consumption (for example Butler et al., 2014; Binkley, 2006), and may be of interest to sustainable consumption and practice theory studies (for example Spaargaren, 2011; Shove et al., 2012; Welch and Warde, 2015). This chapter highlighted the need to consider agency and resistance within acts of consumption and how ‘everyday’ patterns need probing to expose underlying governing practices and instances of dwellers being active.

Empirical data also revealed that often shifts in consumption occurred due to spatial restrictions rather than a change in mentality. This finding contributes to tiny home scholarship that has yet to acknowledge or explore this aspect of the THL, to the best knowledge of the researcher. Furthermore, this has the potential to add to conversations around the enactment of consumption and the spatiality of home within sustainable consumption literature. This area has received minimal academic exploration and the need for future research is engaged with in section 7.6.

Additionally, the contribution of this chapter fits within explorations of lifestyles similar to the THL (i.e. ethical consumption, anti-consumption and voluntary simplification). The THL is suggested to have aspects of all of these lifestyles, and similarly, they have increased in popularity amidst contemporary economic instability. Ethical consumption, minimalism and simplification scholarship (for example McDonald et al., 2006; Lee and Ahn, 2016; Nelson et al., 2007; Cherrier, 2008; Lewis and Potter, 2013; Rodriguez, 2017; Dopierala, 2017) has questioned the increase in growth of these lifestyles in recent years. This probing exposed how motivations for adoption of such lifestyles are not straightforward. Pringle and Thompson (1999), Berlant, (1997), Zavestoski (2002), and Binkley (2006) argue that civic responsibility and anti-consumption mentalities have been widely reduced to self-realisation, self-actualisation, and personal growth. This thesis demonstrated how dwellers have been self-governed into restricting and sacrificing, yet they understand this as a part of their ‘project of the self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Dwellers adopted anti-consumerism, minimalism, and simplification discourses and came to develop themselves amidst the need to shift patterns of consumption. This highlights the need to investigate underlying governing practices and consider other factors (i.e. financial) that can lead individuals to ‘become’ these types of ‘more ethical’ consumers. This empirical exploration may be of interest to

scholarship that has similarly investigated patterns of consumption under the contemporary neoliberal mentality of rule (for example Clarke and Newman, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Flint, 2003; Binkley, 2006).

Furthermore, the empirical findings of this chapter contribute to the claim that the THL is appropriating poverty due to the ‘choice’ involved in getting rid of possession and downsizing one’s life (Westhale, 2015). This thesis brings this hypothesis into question. The THL was primarily about seeking financial security amidst the aftermath of an economic recession for these dwellers. The opportunity to pursue financial security in this way is elitist and this has been acknowledged by this research. However, this investigation highlights how this narrative of ‘voluntary poverty’ around the THL is not so clear-cut.

This thesis highlighted the THL’s relationship to traditional consumer culture. Arguably, dwellers made consumptive choices and developed subjectivities at the point of intersection between more ‘mainstream’ forms of consumption (i.e. ‘one in, one out’ mentality, filling a storage space with ‘stuff’) and the recent ethical turn in governing practices around consumption (Lewis and Potter, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Binkley and Littler, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005). The THL was arguably identified by this thesis as another ‘mode of consumption’ and a commodified version of sustainability that sits within capitalist tendencies. This is supported by Anson’s (2014) similar findings on the THL. This contributes to scholarship on other ‘alternative’ lifestyles that have been similarly perceived (for example Dopierala, 2017; Rodriguez, 2014). Despite this determination, conduct around consumer culture was challenged by the THL as dwellers ‘chose’ how to talk about their need to consume differently. This finding supports the claim that anti-consumerism and materialism do not exist in contradiction with one another but on the same continuum and are in continual negotiation (Lee and Ahn, 2016; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Iyer and Muncy, 2009; Featherstone, 1990). Consumptive aspects of the THL were determined to be ‘messy’, as highlighted by both the ever-growing commodification of these often ‘Disneyfied’ homes and the potential for this lifestyle to offer a housing option that reduces consumption and environmental impact (Anson, 2014; Wilson and Boehland, 2005). These findings emphasise the pressing need for continued academic investigation around this and other similar lifestyles (returned to in 7.6).

The goal of this thesis was to inform understandings around governing mechanisms that shape the pursuit of housing, debt encumbrance and consumer culture. As this discussion has demonstrated, this thesis achieved the ROs it set out. This thesis also made some useful theoretical and methodological contributions and these are presented next.

7.3 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contribution of this thesis fits within governmentality understandings in the contemporary neoliberal era. Specifically, this thesis exposed elements of Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics', governing understandings of 'freedom' (Rose, 1999a), post-modern conditions of consumption (Rose, 1996a), and the Foucauldian notion of 'counter-conduct' (Foucault, 2007), as they relate to this alternative housing option.

Firstly, this investigation of the THL was rooted in Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics', or the understanding that governing practices look to influence values and beliefs that suggest self-reliance and responsibility as the ethical way to be. This research revealed how 'ethopower/ethopolitics' transpired within this particular context. Dwellers sought this alternative housing option in order to take responsibility over their housing and not to be deemed burdensome members of society in an era of housing instability. Indeed, dwellers were 'governed at a distance' by the 'contemporary regime of the self' to work on their 'project of the self' (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000). Yet, this research exposed how dwellers appropriated notions of being morally superior to justify this 'choice'. For example, dwellers made claims of moral superiority for the THL as compared to traditional housing and consumer culture. Essentially, dwellers inverted norms that suggest those acting outside of traditional homeownership are flawed and less responsible consumers in order to justify this newfound 'project of the self' that includes being a 'tiny houser'. This research adds to scholarship on Rose's (2000) 'ethopower/ethopolitics' in exposing how, in this context, individuals were both governed to be autonomous citizens in pursuit of being the best version of the 'self', while also gaining insight on how people understand and validate this 'project of the self' in an era of restrictive policymaking (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b, 2000; Foucault, 1988, 1991, 2007).

Secondly, Rose's (1999a) work on the governing of freedom and how the contemporary regime operates through making people 'feel free', as presented in *Powers of Freedom*

(1999a), was used by this thesis. As dwellers overwhelmingly identified freedom in many aspects of the THL, the goal was to explore how dwellers understand the THL as ‘freeing’ and themselves as self-determining and autonomous members of society. This research uncovered how self-governing tactics were embedded within feelings of being ‘free’ and self-determinate. Dwellers identified taking responsibility over their housing in this way as ‘more free’ than traditional housing and debt encumbrance and attached notions of empowerment and being ‘enterprising’ to this ‘choice’. This research contributes to understandings of the power of this neoliberal regime that looks to, and seemingly has, infiltrated all aspects of life.

Next, Rose (1996a) argues that conduct is governed through operating ‘on a territory marked out by the vectors of identity, choice, consumption and lifestyle’ (p. 344) and this was apparent within this investigation. Consumption was used by dwellers to create and maintain the ‘self’ and position the ‘self’ in the THL community and in society. Dwellers identified ‘choice’ and freedom in their consumption around the THL despite the many restrictions and sacrifices that were required. Supported by Binkley’s (2006) claim, these dwellers found freedom in the ability that consumption offered them to ‘transform’. These dwellers developed new consumptive subjectivities in order to align the need to consume differently with their ‘project of the self’ as an ethical and responsible citizen-consumer. These findings provide an exploration of how the ‘contemporary regime of the self’ works through governing rationalities to place consumptive responsibility on the individual in their pursuit of being the best version of the ‘self’. However, this research also exposed how dwellers contested being governed in this way through ‘choosing’ how to talk about their need to consume differently. This contribution further informs understandings of how individuals seek to take control and validate their ‘project of the self’ amidst being regulated and limited by the neoliberal mentality of rule.

Finally, this investigation sits within literature on the Foucauldian notion of ‘counter-conduct’ and the ‘micro-physics’ of power (Foucault, 2007), as these dwellers shifted their identities to interrupt governing forces. This thesis provided an empirical example of how resistance never sits outside of power. Arguably, several instances of resistance occurred not in outright rejection of governing, but instead in the way dwellers resisted how governing took place and exerted control over how they identified themselves. McNay (1994) argues that resistance happens when new subjectivities are created, identities are reconstituted, and limits of freedom are engaged with and pushed and this research identified many instances of

such happenings. The exposure of active and resistant subjects around the THL was further supported by the methodological approach taken by this research and this is reviewed next in section 7.4.

7.4 Methodological contributions

Following from these contributions, providing both a theoretical and methodological contribution, this thesis has employed an application of the ethnographies of neoliberal governmentalities approach (Brady, 2014). This research may be of interest to this emerging field (for example Li, 2007; Collier, 2011; Lippert, 2012; Brady, 2014; Brady and Lippert, 2016; McKee, 2011, 2016). These methods do not represent a specific methodology or necessarily hold strictly to traditional ethnographic approaches of participant observations (Brady, 2016) and this thesis provided one way to interpret this non-archival approach. The use of ethnographic observation methods coupled with semi-structured interviews proved useful in giving a ‘voice’ to these ‘lay perspectives’. These methods were executed to avoid being deterministic and static in understanding social transformations, which is said of many traditional methodological approaches to governmentalities (Brady, 2014). This research highlighted how giving consideration to these individuals that make ‘choices’ amidst the affordable housing crisis and economic instability resulted in a perspective not achieved through relying on quantitative trends or policy documents. Arguably, the coupling of semi-structured interviews together with ethnographic observations, including staying in a tiny house community, allowed for a more nuanced investigation of these ‘everyday’ happenings. While the semi-structured interview process gave a direct ‘voice’ to dwellers, ethnographic observations and field diary notes taken by the researcher allowed for a more expansive understanding of the context from which these ‘voices’ emerged and the influence of non-liberal rationalities (Brady, 2014).

The methodological contribution of this research fits within Foucauldian governmentality scholarship that has explored the pursuit of housing and, in doing so, has exposed an active subject, for example Flint (2002, 2003), Flint and Rowlands (2003), McKee (2011, 2016), McKee et al. (2017), and McIntyre and McKee (2008). These studies have examined social housing in Scotland (Flint, 2002, 2003; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McKee, 2011), housing regeneration in Scotland (McIntyre and McKee, 2008), ‘new localism’ movements around housing in the UK (McKee, 2016) and ‘Generation Rent’, or young people accessing housing in Scotland (McKee et al., 2017). This thesis adds to this emerging area within housing

studies by exploring the ‘rise’ and experience of the THL in the United States, providing a different geographical area and housing policy context. Similar to the results of these studies, dwellers were found to ‘contest from below’ (McKee, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, the findings of this thesis support the suggested need (see McKee, 2011) to shift the spatial scale of study around housing to the individual experience. Arguably, this approach allowed for the exposure of problems and discourses that would have remained invisible (Lippert, 2005; Brady and Lippert, 2016; Collier, 2013), revealing the actualities of subject formation within this review of the ‘everyday’ around the THL. For example, dwellers expressed freedom in many aspects of the THL, yet further analysis exposed many restrictions attached to these, uncovering these points of contestation. As demonstrated by this research, this methodological approach provided an exposure of how individuals experienced their subjection and were active within this process.

7.5 Research limitations

Despite these important contributions, the limitations of this thesis should also be considered. The researcher acknowledges that the data consists of 20 households, with 24 participants in total, along with personal field notes, and that these individuals were willing and able to participate. Therefore, this is a partial view of the THL. There was an attempt to approach individuals other than THL enthusiasts by interviewing those selling their homes; however these only account for four of the households. The researcher recognises that this methodological approach does not hold strictly to traditional ethnographic methods; however, there are some limitations specific to ethnographic research which are important to acknowledge. Ethnography looks to study ‘at first-hand what people do and say in particular contexts’ (Hammersley, 2006, p. 5). Historically, ethnographic fieldwork has involved an immersive and lengthy stay within a locale or institution. However, today fieldwork has shifted to shorter temporal scales and the influence of this needs unpacking. Short ethnographic explorations can tell a ‘story’ that may neglect both the local and wider histories of people and places (Hammersley, 2006). The researcher cannot assume that what is observed always happens and that it does not change over time. Furthermore, the presence of the researcher can influence the behaviour of the participants, especially if the stay is short-term (Hammersley, 2006). The ethnographic observations used by this thesis occurred on a shorter timescale across more than one location. For example, the researcher spent one week at a tiny house community, three days at the jamboree, and home visits and interviews

were a few hours at most. While this research approach allowed for a wider geographical investigation, the researcher acknowledges that this could have led to a failure in observing change, cyclical happenings, and the histories of these people and places. This research provided an ethnographic investigation of this housing opportunity in this particular geographical area and housing policy context at this time in history. It is acknowledged that the ‘story’ may change for these dwellers, and/or that the whole ‘story’ was not captured by this research. The goal of an ethnographies of governmentality approach is to bring together social science methods in order to ‘critically reflect on dominant narratives around neoliberalism’, and this was achieved by this thesis (Brady, 2016, p. 18).

Secondly, the researcher does acknowledge the benefits that incorporation of other methods could provide, specifically the integration of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) and/or virtual ethnographies (Hine, 2015). The researcher suggests that a critical discourse analysis of policy documents, news stories, TV shows and films, and THL online sites may provide deeper insight. A broad reflection on media attention, political rhetoric, and one prominent THL online site was provided in chapter 2. However, an empirical analysis of these documents could aid in producing a more expansive genealogical review of the THL. This could expose more of the specifics of the growth of this lifestyle in recent years and governing practices involved. Additionally, performing virtual ethnography by becoming involved with THL online communities could deliver insight around how those within the community communicate with and relate to each other. While not necessarily a limitation of this thesis, joining archival and non-archival methods (traditional and virtual ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis of policy documents, news/media, and online sites) in this way could expand upon the findings of this research.

Finally, the limitations of the application of this methodological approach have been acknowledged and reviewed in section 3.5, specifically, the potential issues with the need to shift recruitment strategies in order to bring in ‘voices’ of those trying to sell partway through data collection and the potential problems with online and phone interviews. Arguably, however, awareness of and attempts at overcoming these limitations allowed for a more nuanced review of these individual experiences.

Despite the limitations of this research, the validity remains. This thesis has been successful in giving a ‘voice’ to those seeking housing stability at a specific time and place in history.

An examination of these ‘lay perspectives’ occurred relying on a genealogical review of the THL and led to the exposure of ‘the effects of power at this micro-level’ (McKee, 2009, p. 474) in this particular context. However, the need for future scholarship for finetuning and building upon this research approach and findings is acknowledged.

7.6 Future research

Future research recommendations are positioned in three areas. Firstly, this thesis recommends the use of this methodological approach in the investigation of other alternative forms of housing. To the best knowledge of this researcher, no other studies have used such an approach. Scholarship has reviewed shifts in housing due to the economic crisis, for example communal housing in Stockholm (Nevrokopli, 2018) and collaborative housing in Auckland (Trapani, 2018). Yet housing ‘movements’ are often positioned amidst scholarship on social movements theory and political contestation (for example Di Felicianantonio, 2017), while some are situated within sustainable housing and sustainable development scholarship, such as Scheller and Thorn’s (2018) review of co-housing in Gothenburg and Hamburg. However, supported by the empirical findings of this thesis, the THL is not about creating a collective movement, or even individual action, to foster social change, nor is it primarily motivated by improved sustainability. Instead, this thesis revealed how these dwellers are seeking a means to obtain secure housing while maintaining their autonomy within the modern neoliberal era of instability. Therefore, empirical investigations of alternative housing options may benefit from using this governmentalities approach in order to expose underlying mechanisms that motivated individuals to pursue housing themselves in this way. This can be achieved through the use of similar ethnographic methods relied upon by this research.

Secondly, the need for wider investigation of the impact of spatial restrictions on patterns of consumption within sustainable consumption research was identified. Surprisingly, while a range of studies exist that explore elements of small-space living and consumption, for example household size, energy consumption, and income (Yalcintas and Kaya, 2017) and household size and resource consumption (Lui et al., 2003), there is a lack of academic rigour around the relationship between house size and patterns of consumption. This investigation of the THL contributes to understandings around how spatial restrictions often push consumption outside the home or cause it to happen in different ways. These empirical findings can act as a starting point for such an examination within sustainable consumption

scholarship. This can be achieved by tracing patterns of consumption using methods such as shadowing to learn how consumption is enacted in a range of homes with a variety of sizes in order to investigate spatial influence. Informed by this thesis, the researcher should be aware of the potential for consumption to happen differently or be pushed outside due to spatial restriction. Additionally, there is a need for further investigation of how consumption changes within the same household due to downsizing, while quantifying practices and technologies specific to small-space living (i.e. travel or embedded carbon in gadgets) would provide a more precise understanding of the environmental impact.

Finally, this thesis highlighted the lack of systemic academic scholarship on the THL. This is perhaps unsurprising due to the newness of this lifestyle and its post-recession growth. However, the need for academic engagement is pressing. This research provides a contribution to this limited scholarship through offering an investigation of the actualities of this lifestyle and questioning the many positive benefits proponents of the THL promote (low cost, simplification, sustainability, less regulation). Further, this thesis determined why and how these dwellers came to this lifestyle. Yet, there is a need for further exploration around many aspects of the THL, some of which were exposed within this research. For example, the commodification of the THL and how the THL was arguably identified as another ‘mode of consumption’ and a commodified version of sustainability. This can be achieved through performing research that focuses on the exponential growth of this lifestyle and further review of how it is promoted, practised and talked about amongst the community, perhaps using critical discourse analysis of THL online sites and community forums, as recommended in section 7.5. Furthermore, empirical explorations of builders of tiny houses would be useful as a means to gain more insight around growth and trends within the community.

7.7 Global relevance

While this research investigates a small-living alternative in the United States, the THL has gained popularity elsewhere (largely Australia, Canada, and the UK) (Business Wire, 2018), and other non-traditional housing choices are on the rise globally due to a widespread housing crisis; for example co-housing in Hamburg and Gothenburg (Scheller & Thorn, 2018), container homes in Australia (Islam et al., 2016), homes from straw bale in the UK (Walker, Thomson, & Maskell, 2016), and micro-housing in the US (Carter, 2015; Wang, 2016). Therefore, the broader implications of this research need ‘unpacking’, and can offer

some insight into the global arena. Neoliberal housing policy implemented in recent decades has normalised market-based housing finance models, resulting in ‘a global U-turn in prevailing housing and urban policy agendas’ (Rolnik, 2013, p. 1058). The commodification of housing has ignited a globalised industry, whereby housing is attached to global capital flow and less attached to local happenings (Florida & Schneider, 2018). These policy instruments have proven inadequate in providing affordable housing solutions, witnessed by the continued global housing crisis, despite post-recession economic ‘recovery’. Indeed, according to UN Special Rapporteur for Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, ‘housing has lost its social function and is seen instead as a vehicle for wealth and asset growth. It has become a financial commodity, robbed of its connection to community, dignity and the idea of home’ (Farha, 2017).

This thesis provides an investigation of a response to this global housing crisis; a response which resulted in a growing industry of tiny houses, and the onset of markets in Canada (Forster, 2018), Australia (Carey, 2018), and the UK (Sebag Montefiore, 2017). The approach taken by this research allowed for a substantive probing into the actualities of such a housing alternative and placed it within the commodification and financialisation of housing. Therefore, this research can inform other housing contexts and investigations of housing alternatives through its discovery of the many nuanced happenings around such a housing ‘choice’, and how these may impact upon future housing trajectories. Specifically, the response to the need to find adequate housing and financial security within contemporary policymaking, the attachment of personal success and drive to this pursuit, and the variation depending on life stage (i.e., Compromisers versus Detractors). Similarly, this can be witnessed in how individuals view the marketisation of other goods and services amidst neoliberal governance. For example, the privatisation, deregulation, and marketisation of education has increasingly become the norm, and is seen by some as a positive means to increase national competitiveness and economic growth, entitled the ‘global knowledge economy’ (Dovemark et al., 2018). Research in the UK, France, and the US has shown extensively how this creates a wider divide between social class and ethnicity (Dovemark et al., 2018). Policymakers continue to implement these market solutions rooted in the meritocracy myth and individualism. Similar to the housing crisis, the commodification of higher education, especially in the US, has resulted in individuals seeking alternatives (community college, state universities), while overall enrolment rates decrease each year

(Wong, 2016). Relevantly, this thesis lays out an approach to investigate such neoliberal instruments, looking to expose how individuals are aligning with or acting against such policies at the ground level.

The contradictions and adaptations involved in shifting one's lifestyle in this way, exposed by this research, may be of interest to broader strategies looking to find sustainable and long-term solutions for the housing crisis. Specifically, this research may inform urban density and design research (for example Ye, 2015; Patel, 2011), contributing an understanding of how dwellers relate to downsizing and consumption. Further, this research found 'tiny housers' to have other future housing aspirations, with many looking to transition from wheels to a small house on a foundation due to the unease living on wheels, the desire to grow their family or the concern with legalities; perhaps foreshadowing an evolution of the THL. Indeed, transitioning to tiny houses on foundations could limit some of the woes, including value depreciation and issues with parking. This understanding can inform the direction of the THL industry and other alternative housing options, both in the US and elsewhere. At the same time, restrictive regulation and zoning allowances, especially in urban areas, has decelerated growth of this lifestyle. More broadly, this can be linked to the urban housing crisis, which in part is the result of a workforce and low-income housing shortage due to zoning and policies that support more profitable building projects; and this is a global occurrence (Florida & Schneider, 2018). Therefore, these regulatory issues found around the THL highlight broader issues of housing inequality and injustice.

This research highlighted how neoliberal tendencies have infiltrated this alternative housing option via the commodification of the THL, revealing how a 'solution' meant to counter neoliberal institutions, can easily become entwined in them. The implications of this tension were identified in how some tiny house 'purest' disavowed the tiny house industry. Comparable divisions and claims of superiority are observed within other lifestyle 'choices', for example 'true' vegans versus plant-based dieters (Block, 2018). Additional contradictions within the THL were exposed, for example claims of the appropriation of poverty, and together these contribute to scholarship on neoliberalisation of alternative 'choices' and activism (for example Steele, 2012; Roff, 2007; Di Felicianantonio, 2016; O'Callaghan, Di Felicianantonio, & Byrne, 2018); insights of which aid in 'locating' these responses in a Foucauldian understanding of power where subjects are both 'produced' and 'productive',

and exist within this tension. More generally, this thesis contributes to wider scholarship on neoliberalism and contemporary housing (for example Jacobs & Manzi, 2019) and especially that which has explored governance and both responses and solutions to the crisis (for example Di Felicianantonio, 2016; Gillespie, 2017; Wright, 2015; Pares et al., 2017). As noted, to the knowledge of this research, an alternative housing option has not been conceptualised through the lens of neoliberal governance in this way (ethnographies of governmentality) to date. This is of particular significance as this thesis places this ‘choice’ amidst the policies and rationalities that ‘forced its hand’. This investigation of a phenomenon with such time and space parameters highlights the usefulness of exploring the actualities of how neoliberalism ‘happens’ at the ‘everyday’; to give credence to the ‘voices’ of these citizens alongside a wider critique of contemporary institutions.

7.8 Concluding thoughts

This thesis demonstrated how an unaffordable housing market ignited new housing ‘choices’, shifting identities in this process and potentially altering housing trajectories for dwellers in the future, especially the younger cohort. This recognition is critical to exposing the pursuit of housing within the modern neoliberal era. The goal was to investigate: (1) to what extent individuals are governed into this housing option; (2) how subjectivities are developed and reconstituted around the THL; (3) how the THL counters, disrupts or aligns with the tendency around governing the pursuit of housing; and (4) the impact of this small-living option on patterns of ‘everyday’ consumption. This thesis achieved these objectives and contributed to the understandings of how modern liberal rationalities of rule look to infiltrate all aspects of life in order to ‘govern at a distance’ and create autonomous citizens in pursuit of being the best version of the ‘self’ (Rose, 1996a/b, 1999a/b; 2000; Foucault, 2005). This research positioned the THL within this understanding to contribute to these debates and future understandings of these conceptual devices.

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Appendix

A Ethical approval

17th June 2016

Megan Carras

Geography and Geosciences

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Ethics Reference No: | GG12151 |
| Project Title: | ‘Tiny house, big impact’: Exploring the Tiny House Movement in the United States. |
| Researchers Name(s): | Megan Carras |
| Supervisor(s): | Dr Louise Reid & Dr Kim McKee |

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered by the Geography and Geosciences School Ethics Committee on the date specified below. The following documents were reviewed:

Ethical Application Form
Participant Information Sheet
Consent Form

14th June 2016
14th June 2016
14th June 2016

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the ‘Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice’ (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Matt Southern
Convenor of the School Ethics Committee